

ASPECTS OF POWER AND HISTORY IN THE DICTATOR NOVELS

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by

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To Zander and  
Lúcia Cristina,  
with love.

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## A B S T R A C T

The thesis constitutes a study of aspects of power and history in the novels Yo el Supremo by Augusto Roa Bastos, El Recurso del Método by Alejo Carpentier and El Otoño del Patriarca by Gabriel García Márquez. The first part (chapters 1 and 2) presents an analysis of how the idea of power appears in the narrative, by comparing the three works. The second part (chapters 3, 4 and 5) examines the notion of history in the novels, yet each chapter deals mainly with one of the books mentioned.

Chapter 1 investigates the relation between the structure of power and patterns of dependency experienced by the countries described in the novels. It gives evidence of contrasts in the dictators' actions. While the Primer Magistrado and the Patriarca merely want to retain their personal power, even if this results in the growing dependency of their nations on foreign powers, El Supremo uses his power precisely to avoid the economic subordination of Paraguay, whose sovereignty suffered continuous menace.

Chapter 2 examines three aspects of power. The first is a study of the dictators' solitude and shows that it represents the immediate consequence of despotism, being the price of power. The second is about the role of the double, revealing that he serves to intensify the accumulation of power. And the third aspect is the analysis of how the dictators maintain their power through persistent violence.

Chapter 3 analyses Carpentier's use of history in his works, particularly in El Recurso del Método. His worldview is revealed in the development of his works through failed revolutions. However, this fact does not indicate pessimism, as hope of effective change appears through the character of the Student. The other section compares the transformations occurring in the historical epoch and their fictional correlation. Yet, the author presents history in a literary way through the use of humour.

Chapter 4 discusses history in El Otoño del Patriarca. The study focuses upon the lack of historical consciousness in García Márquez's characters, and also in some of Carpentier's. In both is established the failure to understand history as a process, due especially to the repression of past memories and the false perspective of circular time. The chapter stresses, however, that this is the characters' view, not the authors'.

Chapter 5 studies Yo el Supremo in a historical perspective. The novel is a counter-history of Paraguay showing that the official version of history is frequently warped by ideology. Thus, the chapter compares Roa Bastos's view on El Supremo to the historians'. It also shows the relation between past, present and future which establishes the series of "necessary anachronisms" (according to Hegel) characterizing the narrative, and revealing the author's dialectical world vision.

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*"When the axe came into the  
forest, the trees said: the  
handle is one of us"*

*(Turkish proverb)*

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

This study examines the relationships between literary creation and concrete social processes, as I intend to investigate writers whose works are representative, and mark typical nodal points in the development of the dictator novel in Latin America. These literary pieces, which were first published almost simultaneously, are El Recurso del Método (1974) by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, Yo el Supremo (1974) by the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos and El Otoño del Patriarca (1975), by Gabriel García Márquez<sup>1</sup>.

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1. CARPENTIER, Alejo. El Recurso del Método. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 3rd Spanish edition (14th Mexican edition), December, 1976; ROA BASTOS, Augusto. Yo el Supremo. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 2nd Spanish edition (6th Mexican Edition), September, 1976; GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, Gabriel. El Otoño del Patriarca. Madrid, Plaza & Janés, 2nd edition, July, 1978. When quoting excerpts from these books the abbreviation RM means El Recurso del Método, YES is for Yo el Supremo and OP for El Otoño del Patriarca, followed by the page number. Concerning the names of the dictators, main characters in these novels, I will refer to them, respectively, as *Primer Magistrado*, *El Supremo* and *Patriarca*, as found in the original Spanish versions, but not italicized.

The time of publication is not the only point these books have in common<sup>2</sup>. They inaugurate a new literary vein, roughly termed "dictator novels", despite the great number of novels dealing with the theme of dictatorship in Latin America before their appearance<sup>3</sup>. Even if relying upon concepts derived from political science or sociology, previous novels did not, in fact, represent the individual dictator as the protagonist of the narrative, for he was usually only a minor character. In these novels by Carpentier, Roa Bastos and García Márquez, on the contrary, the dictators occupy a central role and their personality is scrutinized in detail. Consequently, in addition to the portrayal of a dictatorial regime, these books also concentrate on the analysis of the complex personal characteristics which identify the ruler of this regime as an individual. I consider very appropriate their definition as

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2. In fact, the central theme these writers have chosen for their novels is not exactly a coincidence, since it seems to have been decided during a Latin American conference, when a group of novelists agreed that each would endeavour to produce a novel centered on the figure of a major dictator of his own country. According to FOSTER, David William. Augusto Roa Bastos. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1978, p.91 and 122.
  3. Among the most important Hispanic American novelists who wrote about dictatorship in Latin America are the Mexicans Martín Luis Guzmán, in Sombra del Caudillo (Mexico, Cia. General de Ediciones, 1964) and Luis Spota, in El Tiempo de la Ira (Mexico, Editorial Diana, 1967); the Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias, in El Señor Presidente (in: Obras Completas. Madrid, Aguilar, volume I, p.175-462); the Ecuadorian Gerardo Gallegos, in El Puño del Amo (Havana, Cultura, 1938); the Paraguayan Gabriel Casaccia, in La Llagu (Buenos Aires, Editorial Guillermo Kroft, 1963), and the Chilean Henrique Lafourcade, in La Fiesta de Rey Acab (Santiago de Chile, Editorial Zig-Zag, 1959). In addition to these, some important novels on the same subject by non - Latin American writers are Nostromo, by Joseph Conrad (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974); Tirano Bandejas, by Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1978), and The Comedians, by Graham Greene (New York, The Viking Press, 1966).



dictator novels because, though apparently treating the same theme as the former narratives on dictatorship, these books present, moreover, accounts of the dictators as human and social beings. Or, as Castellanos and Martinez have correctly emphasized, they "help to understand the despot without justifying despotism"<sup>4</sup>.

The research appeared initially to me as a formidable challenge. A rough and non-systematic survey I carried out with people who have read El Recurso del Método, Yo el Supremo and/or El Otoño del Patriarca, in order to evaluate their feelings towards the novels, revealed odd results. Except those already familiar with the intricacies of a literary text, most of those I questioned labelled these novels as "too difficult" or "too complex", and many even confessed to having stopped reading before their completion. This potentially disheartening background, however, only reinforced the main objectives I had set to reach with this study, objectives that constitute an attempt to overcome the barrier formed by all the complexities embodied in these acclaimed masterpieces. These books are not just to be read but are rather to be perused, which might open new routes for a deeper analysis of their literary complexities and achieve-

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4. See the essay by CASTELLANOS, Jorge and MARTINEZ, Miguel, "O ditador latinoamericano, personagem literário", in: Oitenta, Porto Alegre, number 6, L&PM, p.147-176, 1982. The authors stress the fact that before the appearance of the "dictator novels" by Carpentier, Roa Bastos, García Márquez and Uslar Pietri (in: Oficio de Difuntos. Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1976), there were only "dictatorship" novels in the Latin American literary production.

ments. Concerning this aspect, Booth comments on the posture adopted by some novelists, like Trollope, who emphatically declared that the writer's primordial aim was to "make himself pleasant" and that to accomplish this literary result he must create a work whose total meaning can be easily apprehended by the reader. In opposition to this inconsequential notion of literary production, Mark Harris declares: "there is easy reading. And there is literature"<sup>5</sup>. In this sense, the novels by Carpentier, Roa Bastos and García Márquez are not easy reading. They require that the reader becomes the *lector cómplice*, a witty relationship envisaged and defended by Cortázar in Rayuela, which means that the work of art must develop an interaction with the reader so that he is not someone

"que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falsos problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo"<sup>6</sup>.

In my view, Cortázar's demand for readers who participate in all moments of the narrative as real accomplices of the writer, represents a wish universally shared by most artists and is, certainly, an idea cherished by those I

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5. See BOOTH, Wayne C. The Rethoric of Fiction. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p.88 to 116. The critic quotes Anthony Trollope (An Autobiography. London, Ed. Frederick Page, 1950, p. 234-5). Booth's mention of Mark Harris is made on p.90.

6. CORTÁZAR, Julio. Rayuela. Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1977, p.500 (but see also p.453-4).

examine in this study.

The multiple, varied and intricate levels of interpretation found in these novels allow various analytical perspectives. An analysis of the extraordinary and original style, the use of unusual literary images, the inter-connection of diverse narrative voices, and many other formal stratagems - any or all of these elements could be the object of quite interesting studies. Nevertheless, these are also aspects that contribute to the investigation of the socio-political and historical contexts surrounding these literary works whose relations it seems to me very important to elucidate. This is the prime reason why I have decided to limit my research to the analysis of how broad concepts - power and history - are presented in these novels. However, since this is a study dealing primarily with literary criticism, I only tackle the most crucial questions concerning the history of the Latin American continent and forms of power there prevalent, so that their expression in the literary texts will be better understood. Thus, this thesis certainly does not claim to provide a comprehensive investigation of either power structure or historical developments in Latin America. Apart from the lack of real spade-work for such an enterprise, this is not at all what I intend. My aim is to produce a literary study giving a subordinate role to concepts derived from political science, like power, or from the historiography, such as historical data. For this very

reason, the investigation is limited to some "aspects" of power and history, namely, those which clarify the process of literary creation.

The domination of the narrative by a powerful dictator is, undoubtedly, the key element in these three novels, indicating the existence of similarities and differences between them. In fact, Latin America presents such an unfortunate array of dictators and dictatorships that no single definition would be appropriate to explain their characteristics. Johnson, for example, has pointed out that from colonial independence (*circa* 1800) to World War I, at least 117 despots reigned in Latin America<sup>7</sup> and since then another 45 typical dictators have held power. As this astonishing record not only reveals diverse personal idiosyncrasies but also varied styles of government, it is expected that the novels should mirror these differences as well. Yet, it is important to state that though there are many individual differences when these rulers are compared, there are also many political similarities. Certainly, the most important political characteristic their countries generally show is the menace of domination by colonial or neo-colonial foreign centres which while developing unequal economic relations, destroy any possibility of cultural unity among them. Within the borders of these nations, the main

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7. JOHNSON, John J. The Military and Society in Latin America. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1964, p.7.

characteristic they share is the threat of authoritarianism which has become the hallmark of Latin American societies.

I will analyse specifically the relations between power, history and literature. However, these relations emerge only as a historical background and are referred to in the light of the actions and attitudes taken by the individual rulers. Although there is a great distinction between the behaviour of the three dictators described in the novels, the study concentrates mostly on their similarities. The despots of El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca have notable differences between them such as, for instance, the former's erudition and the latter's blatant ignorance and illiteracy. But, if the political dimension is introduced, particularly their blind ambition for absolute power which makes them surrender their countries to imperialist manoeuvres only to preserve this power, they are quite similar. On the other hand, I will attempt to demonstrate how the dictator depicted in Yo el Supremo radically differs from the other two since he defends opposite political objectives and different means to reach them.

Some critics have claimed that the works of Carpentier and García Márquez present arresting distinctions *vis-à-vis* Roa Bastos' novel, especially concerning their ideological tenets<sup>8</sup>. Roa Bastos' work, they stress, is

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8. See MARTIN, Gerald, "Yo el Supremo: the Dictator and his Script", in: Forum for Modern Language Studies, St. Andrews, Scottish Academic Press, volume XV, number 2, April 1979, p.169 to 183. See also USABIAGA, Mario, "Alejo Carpentier y su Primer Magistrado", in: Texto Crítico, Vera Cruz, year II, number 3, January/April, 1976, p.128 to 140.

consistent with his world vision, but those of Carpentier and García Márquez are not, because if they were faithful to it, they would not conceive their characters as they did and the readers would not sympathize with them. In fact, these critics have even labelled El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca as "reactionary", just because the authors dare to describe the dictators as human beings. Martin, for instance, in his otherwise acute essay about Yo el Supremo, criticizes Rama's and Benedetti's appraisals of El Otoño del Patriarca and El Recurso del Método. He insists that these critics seem to have been totally misled by the writers' notorious allegiance to the post 1959 Cuban revolutionary process which made them confound ideological position and literary production, so that their novels should be, consequently, also "revolutionary". The critic emphasizes that "it is an unfortunate fact that novelists who support revolutionary movements can write novels which reveal that their unconscious ideology is profoundly contradictory and even reactionary"<sup>9</sup>.

It is my opinion, however, that Rama and Benedetti are correct when they mention the avowed revolutionary approach of these novels. And it is important

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9. MARTIN, Gerald, op. cit., p.172. The author is obviously here referring to the celebrated essays the Uruguayan critics published in the 70's. See BENEDETTI, Mario. El Recurso del Supremo Patriarca. Mexico, Nueva Imagen, 1979 (Also published in Casa de las Américas, Havana, number 98, September/October, 1976 and in Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana, Lima, number 3, 1976) and RAMA, Ángel. Los Dictadores Latinoamericanos. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976.

to note that they do so not because of the authors' personal evaluation of political processes, but because they are convinced that the contents of these literary texts largely support their argument. In accordance with this idea, I will attempt to demonstrate that precisely because these books do not present their main characters as "essentially evil", they are closer to the truth. Though this literary technique may be considered dangerous for it may lead the reader to identify with the despot, it is, nevertheless, a necessary step to achieve the description of the character as a real and not an abstract being. Because, as Castellanos and Martinez stress, "in order that a character may achieve importance and depth, giving the impression of living his own life, it is necessary that he conjugate (as in reality) the positive with the negative, good and bad, beautiful and ugly. It is necessary to look at the totality of being, viewing him in the intimacy of his conscience and not only his external behaviour"<sup>10</sup>.

The contradictory essence of life is also revealed in the description of the three characters, and it approximates them to reality. As a result, one of the most important achievements in the narratives referred to is precisely to restore to the *dictador de república* the ordinary human characteristics that stereotyped interpretations have usually omitted, which shows the non-manichean

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10. CASTELLANOS, Jorge and MARTINEZ, Miguel, op. cit., p.157 (my translation).

outlook the authors have embraced. In this sense, El Recurso del Método, El Otoño del Patriarca and Yo el Supremo are truly revolutionary texts. Without denying the personal attributes of every individual dictator, these novels also stress their merely relative importance in the course of events. If tyranny is founded upon human relations and not upon any supra-historical base, the ideological idea of an insuperable power structure is simply illusory. It is logically correct to suppose then that every oppressed individual, in such forms of government, holds in his hands the potentiality of change.

The bibliographical review I have carried out has evinced the unquestionable literary excellence of Yo el Supremo. The masterpiece by Augusto Roa Bastos is almost unanimously ranked as one of the most impressive pieces literature has ever produced, an opinion even held by those who have failed in assessing the author's real objective in his novel<sup>11</sup>. However, this is not the case of El Recurso del

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11. Roa Bastos tries to redeem El Supremo and his time from the injustices made to him throughout history. Some critics who failed to understand it are Antonio Piño Mendez, in "Yo el Supremo, dictadura y polémica" (in: La Palabra y el Hombre. Xalapa, Mexico, January/March, 1976, p.70-80), where the critic is only able to point out the negative aspects of that *época negra* (p.72) in Roa Bastos' novel. See also BELLINI, Giuseppe. Il Mondo Allucinante, da Asturias a García Márquez. Studi Sul Romanzo Ispano-Americano della Ditadura. Milan, Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1976. The critic supports a totally distorted view of Roa Bastos' main novel, affirming, for instance, that "Attraverso le parole del Supremo lo scrittore condanna duramente l'aberrazione del potere[...] Ma ciò che Roa Bastos realmente perseguitava, ed è naturale, era la condanna totale del personaggio e della dittatura" (p.157). The Swedish writer, Artur Lundkvist, in spite of his erudite historical  
(p.t.o.)



Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, which are often said to have fallen below the previous high standards of their authors' literary production. I do not intend to view the novels according to any literary ranking, whether based upon personal judgement or founded on public acclamation, but I do present a defence of the novels by Carpentier and García Márquez. The point I want to analyse in depth, in hope of disclaiming it, is the accusation of political apostasy against both authors, that is, the charge that their cited novels represent a clear break with their world vision<sup>12</sup>.

All great literary works express a world vision, Goldmann rightly emphasizes. Its formation is the product of a consciousness developed collectively, which reaches its highest expression precisely in the work of the writer, for

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11. (cont.) knowledge about Latin America, also drew incorrect conclusions about Roa Bastos' novel. He does not discern that Stroessner's present dictatorship is the opposite of Francia's dictatorship, not only in terms of its actual form of government, but especially if their social objectives are compared. See his article, "En märkvärdig diktador", in: Dagens Nyheter, apud CASABIANCA, Carlos Luis, "La 'dictadura' del Dr. Francia en Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos", in: ANDREU, Jean et alii. Seminario sobre 'Yo el Supremo' de Augusto Roa Bastos. Poitiers, Centre de Recherches Latino-Américaines de l'Université de Poitiers, 1976, p.52.

12. A world vision, according to Goldmann, means "not an immediate, empirical fact but a conceptual working hypothesis indispensable to an understanding of the way in which individuals actually express their ideas. Even on an empirical plane, its importance and reality can be seen as soon as we go beyond the ideas of work in a single writer and begin to study them as part of a whole". In: GOLDMANN, Lucien. The Hidden God: a Study of Tragic Vision in the 'Pensées' of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p.15.

"The expression which his work provides is then studied by the historian who uses the idea of the world vision as a tool which will help him to deduce two things from the text: the essential meaning of the work he is studying and the meaning which the individual and partial elements take on when the work is looked on as a whole"<sup>13</sup>.

The three novels which constitute the analytical backbone of this research are clearly grounded in Marxist concepts. Yet, the appropriation of this theoretical perspective varies slightly, as the authors focus the paradigm from different standpoints, sometimes explicitly rescuing Marxist notions and at other times only making indirect reference. But the authors definitely dwell on Marx' view of social development and on his opposition to all forms of political oppression. The fact that the reader may sometimes be sympathetic towards the main characters, despite their dictatorial rule, does not mean that the writers' ideology is, in the least degree, reactionary or even contradictory. In my opinion, when historical perspectives and/or historical facts are borrowed to constitute a basic framework for a literary project, what should become defined, as a necessary preliminary step, is that literature is confined to the domain of art production. In opposition to history, it may be largely constructed by subjective interference. Even if the author seeks to create an objective text his/her constraints and possible allegiance to real events are intensely diffused. Works of art establish, then,

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13. Ibid., p.18.

a different set of links with real life than would be found, for example, in any treatise on economics or sociology or, of course, history. "Events are the real dialectics of history. They transcend all arguments, all personal judgments, all vague and irresponsible wishes", Gramsci alerts us<sup>14</sup>, thus indicating the limitations those sciences work under, an imposition the artistic creator may solemnly ignore. Literature's weapons may be rather different and in the cases under investigation one of the most devastating and skillfully employed, is humour.

Taking Rabelais as his text for analysis, Bakhtin<sup>15</sup> reveals how the diverse manifestations of utopia developed by ordinary people - festivals, carnival, laughter - oppose the ideology of the ruling class. He demonstrates how in medieval folk culture laughter was a means of overcoming the central notions propagated by the official culture. Therefore, it is by recourse to a penetrating humour, through the sharp satire of dictatorship, particularly in El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, that the writers demonstrate that their works are undoubtedly consistent with their world outlook. Humour, which is a page-to-page device in these novels, is used with the objective of undermining the seriousness of the power holders and, consequently, serves to destroy the fear they usually inspire in the oppressed classes. Although in Yo el Supremo ironic passages can be

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14. GRAMSCI, Antonio. Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926). London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, p.15.

15. See BAKHTIN, Mikhail. Rabelais and his World. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

singled out as well, I consider the above characteristic a particular facet of El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, where the despots are completely demolished by mocking laughter. These novels epitomize, then, "the victory of laughter over fear" mentioned by Bakhtin when he studied the medieval culture of humour embedded in the carnival rituals:

"Laughter is essentially not an external but an interior form of truth; it can not be transformed into serious -ness without destroying and distorting the very contents of the truth it unveils. Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. It unveils the material bodily principle in its true meaning. Laughter opened men's eyes on that which is new, on the future[...] This is why laughter could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remained a free weapon in their hands<sup>16</sup>.

This is clearly the case of the tyrants described by Carpentier and García Márquez, and it is my intention to demonstrate this in the course of this study. The reader's laughter "when it triumphed over the fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power, boldly unveiled the truth about both"<sup>17</sup>. The work of art may therefore serve not as an inconsequential consumer product but as an instrument of human liberation.

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16. Idem, p.94 (my emphasis).

17. Ibid., p.92.

The methodology underlying this research is mainly characterized by the logical necessity of capturing the universal through particularities, based on a careful textual analysis that shows the historical aspects inherent in the narrative. This study is divided in two parts. The first, comprising Chapters 1 and 2, is devoted to the analysis of aspects of power and the second, Chapters 3, 4 and 5, investigates various aspects of history in the novels under scrutiny.

Chapter 1 attempts to elucidate how power structures and patterns of dependency are presented in El Recurso del Método, El Otoño del Patriarca and Yo el Supremo. My intention is to establish a direct comparison between the main protagonists of these novels, viz., the Primer Magistrado, the Patriarca and El Supremo. While the former two merely want to secure their personal power, even if this causes the growing dependency of their nations on international imperialism; the latter uses his power to defend his nation from the yoke of colonialism. The first half of the chapter concentrates on the novels by Carpentier and García Márquez. I demonstrate that the power claimed by the despots is actually not so absolute as it seems to be, for it must be confronted to a stronger force, namely, foreign mechanisms of political and economic interference. The final section of the chapter studies the dictator described by Roa Bastos. His power is certainly greater than the other two formerly mentioned, but he uses it to benefit

his people. Even so, some critical voices in the narrative cast doubt on the real necessity of his absolute power.

Chapter 2 analyses three aspects of power appearing in the novels under investigation, that is, the relation between power and solitude, the role of the double and the inherent violence the exercise of unequally distributed power must necessarily involve. The first is a study of the dictator's solitude and shows that it is the immediate consequence of despotism, the price of power. The second element of power I will examine refers to the role of the double, a character appearing in the three novels. His ultimate objective within the literary context is to intensify the power held by the dictator. Finally, the third aspect comprehends the analysis of how the dictators maintain their power through continuous violence. This section also includes a study of *machismo*, as a specific form of violence.

In Chapter 3 I examine the manifestation of history in the work of Carpentier, particularly in El Recurso del Método. Though I will compare the fictional episode to real events which occurred in the history of Latin America, my aim is not to undertake a historiographical comparison but to demonstrate the author's dialectical involvement with reality. His world vision can be clearly discerned in his novels by way of a series of *revoluciones inconclusas*, which lead to his ideal of a socialist revolution, a stage reached at the end of his last novel. In El Recurso del Método, hopes of effective change appear through the character of the

Student. I will touch, then, on some themes appearing in the novel, which are representative of the changes occurring in the historical period concerned, i.e., the first quarter of this century. These are the gradual decline of European hegemony and the rise of United States domination; the growing amount of student unrest and workers movements; the diffusion of revolutionary ideas; the construction of wasteful "great works", such as the lavish Capitol, and the arrival of Italian opera companies.

The historical aspects characteristic of El Otoño del Patriarca are addressed in Chapter 4. The analysis focuses upon the lack of historical consciousness in García Márquez's characters but also in some of Carpentier's. This is due, on the one hand, to the ceaseless repression of the past, a fundamental premise for the development of historical consciousness, and on the other, to the false perspective of time as a circle of mere repetition of events. I will show, then, that the understanding of history as an immutable circle of repetitions is a model opposed to Marxist theory which is rooted in the idea of permanent change. The Chapter stresses, however, that this view is held by the characters, whereas their authors have an opposite perspective about the development of social history.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the novel Yo el Supremo from a historical perspective. I compare Roa Bastos' description of El Supremo to the view usually exposed by

traditional historians, showing that the official version of history is frequently warped by ideology. I will then analyse the relation between past, present and future in the novel, by making comments on the importance of the author's dialectical worldview, indispensable in this kind of approach. The *post mortem* action the author allows his character, the dictator, enables him to jump into the future and into the past, a witty stratagem which provides the "necessary anachronisms" - mentioned by Hegel - and which are very frequent in the narrative.



P A R T I

C H A P T E R 1

THE ANALYSIS OF POWER AND DEPENDENCY IN YO EL SUPREMO,  
EL RECURSO DEL MÉTODO AND EL OTOÑO DEL PATRIARCA

"El poder tiene por base la  
debilidad" (YES, p.94)

The main purpose of this chapter is to establish a comparison between Augusto Roa Bastos' Yo el Supremo, Alejo Carpentier's El Recurso del Método and Gabriel García Márquez's El Otoño del Patriarca, in terms of how power structures and manifestations of political power are presented in the novels. My intention is to discuss aspects related to the political and economic domination exerted by the dictators concerned, so that in the first instance they seem to be holders of absolute power. Nevertheless, it is my contention that such a situation is merely illusory because it becomes clear in the novels' development that there is another force, ubiquitous and much more powerful, behind the throne - imperialism - which actually governs not only most of the actions performed by the rulers but also the internal social and political dynamics of the nations

described. Here, there appears the dichotomy between the characters conceived by Carpentier and García Márquez on the one hand, and Roa Bastos' protagonist, on the other. While the former authors introduce dictators who are nothing more than trivial puppets dominated by foreign economic and political mechanisms, the latter describes the dictator's desperate efforts to defend his nation from the yoke of imperialism<sup>1</sup>.

There is also a superposition of structures of domination in the novels examined. First, it means that there is the internal class domination in these countries, which shows a strict correlation between class position and the appropriation of power. In this aspect, Roa Bastos' dictator also distinguishes himself from the other two, since he at least tries to safeguard the interests of the lower classes. But there are structures of external domination that must be

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1. "El imperialismo, de acuerdo a Lenin, es el capitalismo en su fase de decomposición, en la que el librecambio es substituido por el monopolio y el capital financiero, que reparten al mundo entre los países capitalistas más desarrollados, y en la que - consecuentemente - la exportación de capitales adquiere más importancia que la exportación de mercancías. Es decir, el imperialismo es un fenómeno social global que se refiere a las peculiaridades que adquiere a la escala mundial el capitalismo en su última fase de desarrollo". In: BARTRA, Roger. Breve Dicionário de Sociologia Marxista. Mexico, Editorial Grijalbo, 1973, p.94. See also BREWER, Anthony. Marxist Theories of Imperialism. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. For a recent essay on imperialism, short yet outstanding, viewing particularly its implications in the cultural sphere, see IANNI, Octavio, "Imperialismo", in his Revolução e Cultura. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1983, p.47-61. By the same author, see also Imperialismo na América Latina. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1974.

emphasized as well, e.g., those developed in the metropolitan centres which, built particularly on uneven economic relationships, are capable of establishing political pressure or even domination.

As a result, I will attempt to demonstrate that the power claimed by the dictators is not so absolute as it seems to be and that this appearance of infinite domination actually conceals their merely relative power within the world economic system. According to Galeano, they are only *funcionarios* in the hands of international powers<sup>2</sup>.

The first half of the chapter analyses the novels by Carpentier and García Márquez. It seeks to reveal in detail the strength of the Primer Magistrado and the Patriarca's absolute power. These dictators, who titled themselves "defenders of their nations", strove in fact to secure their own permanence in power and the section shows aspects of their ceaseless manoeuvres to maintain their domination. Thereafter, I will analyse some aspects in the narrative related to their countries' dependency on foreign centres.

The extraordinary symbolism epitomized by the episode of the sale of the sea in El Otoño del Patriarca seems to me to be the most significant step in a mounting scale of unwarranted appropriations. The cession of the sea is the culmination of a historical process of plunder which started

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2. See GALEANO, Eduardo. Días y Noches de Amor y de Guerra. Barcelona, Editorial Laia, 1979, p.162.

with the discovery of America by the Spaniards. Thus, García Márquez's novel comprises four centuries of colonization and the succession of various world powers in the command of the fictitious country.

In its turn, El Recurso del Método comprehends historically the substitution of European for North-American hegemony. The difference from El Otoño del Patriarca, however, lies in the fact that in Carpentier's novel there is not the same chronological breadth as in García Márquez. The periods are much more delimited, since they cover especially the first quarter of the twentieth century.

In the analysis of El Recurso del Método, I will explore some aspects of this new situation resulting from the American influence: the language changes from Spanish to English, the heroes of history, literature and film are changed into the North-American ones, and even the *Navidades* become "Christmas". And, perhaps, announcing a new era of technological development, the European train is substituted by the motor-car, a symbol of modern times.

Also in this part, I shall examine further the ephemeral nature of the two dictators' power. When the twilight of their days comes, they realize that their omnipotence is a passing illusion. Soon after their deaths nobody will be able to say a word about them, except that they were "a dictator", an anonymous ruler among so many others who have existed in Latin America.

In the second part of the chapter I will study

the connection between power and dependency in Yo el Supremo. The power of the dictator described in the novel is certainly greater than the Primer Magistrado's and the Patriarca's and he channels it mainly to benefit the people of his country. Notwithstanding, several voices echo throughout the narrative, calling into question the relationship between Paraguay's development in that period and El Supremo's absolute power, thus casting doubt on its real necessity.

Next, I will present how El Supremo earnestly opposes all attempts at foreign infiltration in Paraguay - including by way of armed confrontations. He strives mainly against England's endeavours to impose a new pattern of colonization in Paraguay covered by the subtleties of the ideology of the "free trade", which ultimately explains the extraordinary expansion of the British Empire. The dictator had witnessed the still recent dependency on Spain and would not let it happen to his country again. Through a comparison with Argentina, which had submitted herself to this neo-colonialism, I will indicate those developments the dictator wants to avoid occurring in Paraguay. That is, the favouring of a small native elite which supports the British and the inevitable impoverishment of the majority of the population.

The *Porteños'* annexionist purposes become evident in Belgrano and Echevarria's visit to Paraguay, which will also be examined. But there occurred several other attempts to invade and subjugate Paraguay, not only by Argentina but also by Brazil, England, Uruguay and Bolivia. These attacks

and all sorts of pressures compel El Supremo to enforce his isolationist policy and to close the frontiers of his small country.

I shall conclude the chapter with a close analysis of the social and political consequences of El Supremo's unlimited power. Although his dictatorship still maintains some obscure aspects of authoritarianism or even despotism, which have not been clearly examined by historiography, this does not efface its progressive character, particularly if one considers the historical epoch in which it took place.

Last, I shall investigate the importance of the author's worldview in the recreation of this character, i.e., how Roa Bastos' cultural and ideological baggage is inserted into Francia's discourse. I will also focus upon the final "trial", when El Supremo is accused of errors he committed during the exercise of his power. My objective is to demonstrate that the criticism made by his former correligionists is not directed towards what the dictator actually did during his long term of government but, on the contrary, to what he could not do.

# 1. Power and Dependency in 'El Recurso del Método' and 'El Otoño del Patriarca'

To explain the dimension of power held by the dictatorial rulers does not seem viable any longer if it is

done through detailed biographies or a series of complex individual psychological analyses, with no attempt at establishing their connection with the social milieu where they exert their power. In this respect, Rama emphasizes that

"Sólo puede intentarse recolocándolos en sus propias sociedades, vistas con lucidez y comprensión, en las coordenadas del poder verdadero que establece la dependencia de los centros estran-jeros, en el nivel de desarrollo de sus economías y en la constitución de la estructura social que ello inspira"<sup>3</sup>.

In consequence, and considering that the existence of authoritarian regimes - in their various political tones - has always been the registered trade-mark of Latin American history, I will here investigate the internal and external mechanisms which secure the social reproduction of these regimes. And especially how, during a long period of time, it was possible to practice a social control which suffocated the innumerable social movements seeking the political emancipation of the popular classes in the continent<sup>4</sup>.

In my view, details of the economic structure

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3. RAMA, Angel. Los Dictadores Latinoamericanos. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976, p.11. Rama's enlightened analysis of the three novels I am proposing to study here is particularly concerned with this connection between the writer and society.

4. For analyses of these movements, see, for instance, FALS BORDA, Orlando. Las Revoluciones Inconclusas en America Latina (1809-1968). Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1968.

are only sketched in the three novels examined here, but it should be stressed that even so they decidedly correspond to the theory of dependency, or at least to one version of such a theory. Due to the schematism of the fictional form, I suppose it would be rather difficult to relate any of these works in particular to one or other model of the dependency theory, so much debated recently<sup>5</sup>. Yet, though the process of formation of underdeveloped social processes and the existence of underdevelopment as a structural reality are presented principally as a result of external forces, especially economic ones, the superposition of internal structures of domination in the hands of the dictator and his followers is certainly also discernible. Through their transparency we can have an insight into how class struggle appears internally, and though this is only hinted at in these novels, it serves to reveal the real power dimension one class has *vis-à-vis* other classes.

In Chapter 3 I indicate that Carpentier's works follow a coherent unity of objectives. His literary career shows a gradual progression in terms of the presentation of

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5. See Latin American Perspectives, Riverside, volumes I (number 1, 1974) and VIII (numbers 3 and 4, 1981). In these volumes, there is a synopsis of the various tendencies of the dependency theory, giving a clear view of the opinions of different critics who do or not favour this theory. See also Palma's comprehensive essay on this subject. PALMA, Gabriel, "Dependency: a Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?", in: World Development, Oxford, 6(7/8): 881-924, July/August, 1978.



a clearer worldvision, and there I intend to discuss some of his views. Therefore, it suffices to mention at this point what the writer said about the history of America, whose most important characteristic in his opinion is that it is "una ilustración constante [which] no se desarrolla sino en función de la lucha de clases"<sup>6</sup>.

The novels by Carpentier perfectly prove this aspect, i.e., that the political power held by a certain class enables it to repress the yearnings for freedom of the subordinated classes. Through the latent or, sometimes, open conflict among these classes, there developed a political consciousness which made the people begin to oppose the historical patterns of unevenly-distributed privileges widely diffused throughout the continent. Still according to Carpentier,

"En el siglo XX, los países de nuestra América, dotados de una fuerte conciencia nacional, lucharon y luchan contra el imperialismo, aliado a la gran burguesía criolla, por el logro de una independencia total, unida a un anhelo de progreso social. Y esta segunda parte del siglo XX se ha caracterizado por la intensificación de esa lucha en todo ese ámbito del Caribe, lucha por una independencia total ya lograda en Cuba"<sup>7</sup>.

I consider it important to quote these considerations at the very beginning of the following analysis about the relation between power and dependency in El Recurso del

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6. CARPENTIER, Alejo. La Novela Latinoamericana en Vísperas de un Nuevo Siglo y Otros Ensayos. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1981, p.186.

7. Ibid., p.187.

Método. If the author had previously presented, for instance, the struggles of independence in Haiti<sup>8</sup>, which did not offer any change in the prevailing class structure, he now seems to be more concerned with the real independence that would free the country from imperialist domination. This becomes manifest through a neo-colonialism, much subtler than the former Spanish colonialism, but for this very reason, much more powerful.

The real independence dreamt of by the Cuban writer does not yet happen in this novel. But it will be achieved at the end of his subsequent work, Consagración de la Primavera (published in 1978). However, the important argument advanced in El Recurso del Método is the fact that it shows the conjugation of internal and external structures of domination and oppression. And, thus, it throws light on the relevant role played by an external power in the internal development of the nation concerned.

### *1.1 Power is not so absolute as it seems to be*

Notwithstanding the image of absolute power held by the Primer Magistrado - who was "amo de empresas manejadas por trasmano, era Señor de Panes y Peces, Patriarca de Mieses y Rebaños, Señor de Hielos y Señor de Manantiales,

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8. There is a summarized investigation of the novel in which the author analysed this theme - El Reino de este Mundo, published in 1949 - in Chapter 3, in the second part of this research.

Señor del Fluido y Señor de la Rueda" (RM, p.184-5) -, the fact is that he was only a clerk serving a foreign power, a sort of official manipulated by international capital.

In the same manner, García Márquez's Patriarca is described as an omnipotent being. He is "el que manda por los siglos de los siglos hasta en los caseríos más indigentes de los medanos de la selva" (OP, p.140), and whose "poder sin medidas" (OP, p.164), is so measureless to the point of even allowing him the mythical capacity of changing the flowing of the time since he "alguna vez preguntó qué horas son y le habían contestado las que usted ordene mi general" (OP, p.92).

Hence, although at first glance the dictators really give the impression of possessing an infinite political strength concentrated in their hands, it soon becomes clear, when we pay attention to the intricacies of the text, that this power belongs to a much larger and more complex structure of domination.

Both dictators consider themselves the guardians of their nations, or want others to believe that. Therefore, they justify their domination as something not only beneficial to their countries, but even necessary. The Primer Magistrado emphasizes that "la continuidad del poder era garantía de bienestar material y equilibrio político" (RM, p.26), while the Patriarca boasts of having transformed his nation which "entonces [before him] era como todo antes

de él, vasta e incierta" (OP, p.173). They claim to act always in the interest of their countries and the well-being of the people, i.e., acting on behalf of national development and not for their own advantage, thus seeking, at any cost, to preserve the social structure which is the guarantee of the political stability and security of the country. But according to Galeano, this national security, "en buen romance significa: en nombre de la seguridad de las inversiones extranjeras". The Uruguayan critic carries on, emphasizing that

"Lo importante, por encima de la anécdota, es ver que un dictador es un funcionario, y es por eso que yo tengo ciertas dudas acerca de las 'novelas de dictadores', clásicas en América Latina. No creo que la imagen tradicional del dictador, tirano omnipotente que hace hijos y negocios, dueño de grandes plantaciones y que maneja el país como si fuera una empresa privada, tenga mucho que ver con la realidad actual de América Latina. La máquina del poder es cada vez más impersonal, más anónima, y aunque funciona a través de hombres concretos, éstos tienen un valor relativo[...] El dictador, el torturador, el verdugo, actúan al servicio de una estructura internacional de poder"<sup>9</sup>.

Galeano does not specify which are the "dictator novels" he is referring to but I understand that he is not

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9. See Eduardo Galeano's interview with Jorgi Guiu and Antoni Munne, "La aventura de la comunicación", in: El Viejo Topo, Barcelona, number 19, April 1978, p.53.

indicating any of the novels here examined<sup>10</sup>. Because in the novels studied in this thesis there emerges, explicitly, the purely relative value of the transient dictator within the system to which he serves. Both, the Primer Magistrado and the Patriarca, present, at first sight, the image of the traditional tyrant alluded to by Galeano, viz., an almighty being who controls the nation with an iron fist. Neither of them is easily mastered by his opponents, despite the innumerable rebellions narrated throughout the books. Nevertheless, the reader notices later that this is a false appearance, or perhaps only a partial one, as they only succeed in maintaining their power when they can rely on the powerful neighbour country of the North.

It is interesting to mention, however, that the dictators, though they are puppets manipulated by a foreign country to dominate on its behalf, try to preserve the image of self-independence and refute everything that exceeds the limits of their personal power. According to the protagonists' perspective, which the readers agree is full of irony, the handing over of their respective countries to the imperialist power only occurs "in the last instance". I mean, their intention is to convince the people that every attempt was made to prevent this. Thus, there is nothing else to be

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10. Although it must be emphasized that before these ones there were not "dictator novels" but "dictatorship novels". See the essay by CASTELLANOS and MARTINEZ, "O ditador latinoamericano, personagem literário", op. cit., p.147.

done but to effect the complete surrender of their land. In the case of the Primer Magistrado, the sale of part of his country to the United Fruit Co., later examined in Chapter 3 of this study, and which is narrated almost at the outset of El Recurso del Método, shows the line to be pursued by the author in the rest of the book.

## 1.2 El Otoño del Patriarca: the symbolism of the sale of the sea

Concerning García Márquez's novel, the fantastic episode about the sale of the sea to the North-Americans perfectly illustrates the aspect I mentioned above. Through the hyperbolic image - the sea, divided into numbered pieces as if it were a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, being loaded into the *gringos'* ship - is painted a picture of the pillage which the Latin American peoples have endured for centuries. The culmination of this process of looting, however, is postponed by the Patriarca, because the sea represented his great passion. He could not understand the "gringos *tán bárbaros*, como es posible que sólo piensen en el mar para comérselo" (OP, p.243).

The dictator does not take seriously the first North-American ambassador who raised the subject by telling him that his country would willingly accept the sea as a means of payment for the overdue external debt, "que no

han de redimir ni cien generaciones de próceres tan diligentes como su excelencia" (OP, p.243).

Nevertheless, with the passing of time and the pressing visits of succeeding ambassadors, the tyrant realizes that the North-Americans will not be satisfied until the moment they get the ownership of the sea. So, in order to avoid their interference in the nation's internal affairs and to ward off the menace of the imminent landing of marines, the Patriarca finally agrees to the cession of the sea. However, it is necessary to emphasize, at this point, that his reluctance is much more due to the aesthetic pleasure the sea affords him than to any other consideration, i.e., that it is an enormous source of wealth and food to his people. Consequently, he surrenders to the contingency of his threatened power and signs the agreement of the sale of the sea which, he says,

"tuve que firmar solo pensando madre mía Bendición Alvarado nadie sabe mejor que tú que vale más quedarse sin el mar que permitir un desembarco de infantes, acuérdate que eran ellos quienes pensaban las órdenes que me hacían firmar, ellos volvían maricas a los artistas, ellos trajeron la Biblia y la sífilis, le hacían creer a la gente que la vida era fácil, madre, que todo se consigue con plata, que los negros son contagiosos, trataron de convencer a nuestros soldados de que la patria es un negocio y que el sentido del honor era una vaina inventada por el gobierno para que las tropas pelearan gratis, y fue por evitar la repetición de tantos males que les concedí el derecho de disfrutar de nuestros mares territoriales en la forma en que le consideren conveniente a los intereses de la humanidad y la paz entre los pueblos" (OP, p.248-9).

In this passage we may notice a series of important propositions for the analysis of power based on dependency on foreign centres. That is, through the dictator's sound reasoning, which takes into account the changes brought about by financial imperialist domination, he is able to elaborate the necessary excuse to hand out his nation's last resource, represented by the sea. Claiming to abhor the already felt consequences of the landing of the North-Americans, he agrees with their absurd demand, so that they may leave the country. When the American ambition is accomplished, after sucking the last drop of water of the expoliated nation, there is no longer any reason for the marines to remain. They then in fact abandon the country.

Yet, the economic and social sequels of their stay in the underdeveloped country are tragic in terms of new cultural dimensions and social relations which are developed. According to the author's view, it meant not only the diffusion of several illnesses but also the insertion of many social malpractices, such as corruption. The Americans also taught, as good capitalists would, that virtually everything could be obtained with money. As Alfaro observes in his analysis of El Otoño del Patriarca,

"Al hacer del dinero la base fundamental de las relaciones humanas, los valores humanos se subordinan al valor del dólar, medio esencial de supervivencia física. Todo se puede comprar y todo está para la venta"<sup>11</sup>.

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11. ALFARO, Gustavo, "La Nave del Imperialismo en El Otoño del Patriarca - ca", in: Eco: Revista de Cultura del Occidente, Bogota, volume 23/3, number 195, January, 1978, p.329.



Everything is made to sell, including the sea. But the sale of the sea represents the peak of the unbalanced process which marks the history of Latin America and its relation with foreign metropolitan centres, from the discovery until the present day . From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the United States became the "protector" of the Caribbean country against the looting performed for many centuries by the European, but in exchange the Americans claimed the right of lifetime exploitation of the subsoil (OP, p.225). The result of this is that the only remaining and still untouched part of the country described in the novel is the sea, the last natural resource not yet taken over by imperialism.

Always with the purpose of settling the terms of foreign indebtedness, new loans are agreed, each one bigger than the last, until there is no alternative left but the irremediable cession of the sea, as

"habíamos agotado nuestros últimos recursos, desahucios por la necesidad secular de aceptar empréstitos para pagar los servicios de la deuda externa desde las guerras de independencia y luego otros empréstitos para pagar los intereses de los servicios atrasados, siempre a cambio de algo mi general, primero el monopolio del caucho y el cacao para los holandeses, después la concesión del ferrocarril de los páramos y la navegación fluvial para los alemanes, y todo para los gringos" (OP, p.224).

### 1.2.1 Dependency since the discovery

The short excerpt above epitomizes the development of the process of continuous domination in Latin America. It also throws light on the diverse metropolitan centres which enforced their rule on the continent, making the latter increasingly dependent on them. Although García Márquez puts greater emphasis on the actions of North-American imperialism, we should notice that he also refers to European imperialism which preceded it and was the origin of the growing indebtedness of the country. And the Patriarca's age - between 107 and 232 years - indicates the chronological period of this process, encompassing more than a century of dictatorial governments, i.e., since political independence from Spain, won by the Latin American countries in the nineteenth century, to the present day. During this time, it is asserted that the native oligarchies maintained power at the price of uninterrupted and ever-growing concessions to foreign countries. Yet, the book is not limited only to the period that marked the shift from dependency on Spain to the European and, later on, to North - American dependency. Comprising the whole "white" historical period, the narrative goes back more than four centuries when it mentions the discovery of America by the Spaniards. In fact, the process of dependency is described as starting long ago, back to the crucial Friday when the Patriarca

realized that all palace servants were wearing red bonnets. The metaphorical meaning of these bonnets is clear, for they symbolize the beginning of the Spanish domination in Hispanic America. In exchange for the red hats, useless glass pebbles, little mirrors and "otras mercerías de Flandes, de las más baratas mi general" (OP, p.45), the Spaniards are able to win over the local population and take possession of most of the Indian areas - particularly agricultural and mineral resources, imposing, as a result, their domination. The old dictator, confused by this unusual threat to his power, looks at the sea through the window

"por si acaso descubría una luz nueva para entender el embrollo que le habían contado, y vio el acorazado de siempre que los infantes de marina habían abandonado en el muelle, y más allá del acorazado, fondeadas en el mar tenebroso, vio las tres carabelas" (OP, p.45-6).

As regards this image, which confers a notion of time scale on the foreign presence in Latin America, Alfaro observed that "la superposición de las naves del imperialismo español y yanki resume toda una experiencia cultural latinoamericana"<sup>12</sup>, that is, the beginning and end of a process in which the sale of the sea represents the most extreme dimension. The chronological

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12. ALFARO, Gustavo, op. cit., p.333.

discontinuity has the purpose of providing a complete scenario which identifies who actually controls power in Latin America. The dictator, still according to the Colombian critic, is only "an oppressed oppressor, prisoner of imperialism"<sup>13</sup>.

In the case studied, the tyrant had actually been enthroned by the British Empire, being, at the same time,

"proclamado comandante supremo de las tres armas y presidente de la república por tanto tiempo cuanto fuera necesario para el restablecimiento del orden y el equilibrio económico de la nación" (OP, p.256).

When the Patriarca "re-establishes order", he manages to maintain his political authority for an unforeseen long time. This is the fact that allows him to witness the British being replaced by North-American hegemony in Latin America, which took place at the dawn of the twentieth century.

### 1.3 El Recurso del Método: the substitution of European by North-American Hegemony<sup>14</sup>

If one contrasts García Márquez's novel with

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13. Ibid., p.332 (my translation).

14. This topic will be further investigated in Chapter 3, concerning history in El Recurso del Método, since it is directly connected to the history of the countries encompassed in the novel. In the present section I will only touch on some symbolic aspects of this hegemonic substitution.

El Recurso del Método, one can observe that the shift of the owners of power also occurs very clearly in Carpentier's novel. Yet, the epoch in which the narrative develops is much more defined within certain temporal limits. We notice that the Primer Magistrado feels reluctant to accept North-American hegemony, particularly in its cultural aspects. When he visits the opera in New York, for example, his contemptuous comments about the people attending the event clearly indicate this point. Nevertheless, he accepts financial dependency without questioning its future implications.

Yet, when the *gringos* inevitably achieve economic supremacy in the Caribbean, they also bestow upon themselves the right of interfering in other areas. Accordingly, Carpentier describes some of the changes which occurred in the cultural sphere:

a. the first aspect concerns the linguistic appropriation. Instead of the Spanish traditionally taught in schools, English gradually comes to be the predominant language: "This is a pencil, this is a dog, this is a girl, oíase ahora donde antaño habían florecido las Rosa, Rosae, Rosa, Rosam de las declinaciones clásicas" (RM, p.213). The reason for this change is explained shortly after, with the sharp irony which characterizes the whole narrative: "El mundo había entrado en la Era de la Técnica y España nos había legado un idioma incapaz de seguir la evolución del vocabulario técnico" (RM, p. 215);

b. the North-American heroes begin to be inserted in official history. "El Cid Campeador, Rolando, San Luis, La Reina Católica, Enrique IV emigraban de los libros" being substituted by Franklin, Washington, Lincoln, and even by general Custer (RM, p.213);

c. inevitably, literature in general also turns to the best-sellers in the United States. In the bookshops, where previously it had been possible to find books by Anatole France and Romain Rolland, now there are only works in the style of "El Prisionero de Zenda, Scaramouche, Ben-Hur, Monsieur Beaucaire" (RM, p.215);

d. the cinema programmes also reveal the North-American influence, displaying films that Peralta classifies as "visiones de gringos en 'hangover'" (RM, p.216).

In short, we can observe as a definite and lasting relation implanted in the country that the North - American interference becomes predominant and Europe starts definitely to be "el mundo del pasado" (RM, p.215).

### 1.3.1 Christmas toys: the symbolic materialization of capitalist penetration

In the same year when the above mentioned changes occur, another significant alteration is that "las navidades se transformaron en Christmas" (RM, p.220). The author demonstrates how a religious festival celebrated in family gatherings is inculcated with an essentially

consumeristic sense. Responsibility for this is attributed by the author to the influence of American culture. The simple and traditional toys are no longer offered to the children on the Feast of the Magi, symbolizing a commemoration of the biblical scene. In contrast to it, there is a period of thirteen days beforehand promoted by the *gringos* and clearly proclaiming its commercial character:

"Los tenderos españoles, cuyas muñecas largarteranas, valencianas y gallegas, cocinillas con orzas de barro y caballitos de balancín no habían sido descargados todavía en Puerto Araguato, protestaron contra una competencia desleal que, desde el 20 de diciembre, había llenado las vitrinas de artefactos mecánicos, plumas comanches, tablas de 'oui-ja' para jugar al espiritismo - dígame usted! - y panoplias vaqueras - sombrero tejano, estrella de sheriff, cinturón claveteado y dos pistolas en funda de flecos" (RM, p.222).

So, in order to sell their commodities well earlier, inflicting devastating competition upon the local salesmen, the North-American traders do not hesitate to bring forward the distribution of toys from the 6th of January to the 25th of December, thus breaking a long-established custom. They also embody the foreign capitalism which takes over the country without resistance and extends its comprehensive range of influence to all sectors of society.

But the most noticeable feature of these new toys - which replaced the charming rag dolls and wooden hobby-horses - is that they symbolize the beginning of an era of mechanization and automatism. It could then be asserted

that the mechanical artefacts in the shopwindows announce the advance of capitalism, an irresistible force felt everywhere - even in these small and apparently innocent, though influential things.

1.3.2 Trains, representative of European hegemony, are replaced by cars

A decisive trait of this period of increasing North-American supremacy is the end of the expansion of railway systems, introduced into Latin America especially by the British. Meanwhile, the United States experienced the spectacular development of huge assembly lines and the definite success of the automobile, as a symbol of a new industrial era. To the dependent countries of Latin America, this means of transportation was more attractive because now it was not necessary to agree enormous loans with the new metropolis - as was the case with Germany and, particularly, England - in the building of railways in Latin American countries<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, the Primer Magistrado, though he tries to adapt himself to the newly-established situation, continues nevertheless to be the living symbol of the European decadence in Latin America, due to the fact that he

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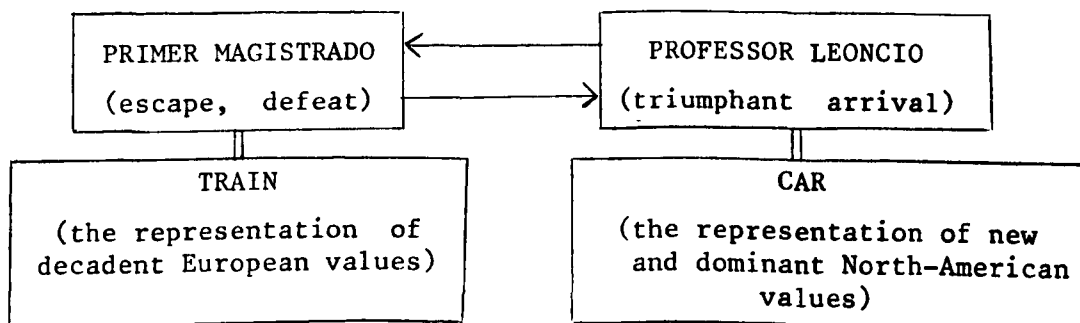
15. See DONGHI, Tulio Halperin. História da América Latina. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1976, p.175.



insists on defending the supposed European cultural superiority. Accordingly, his final escape exemplifies the characteristics just mentioned, since it symptomatically takes place in a train and not in a car. His attempt at fleeing in a car, through the artifice of the ambulance, is eventually frustrated and the Primer Magistrado is forced to appeal to the old train belonging to the German settlers:

"Y se adentra el Trencito de los Alemanes en sus curvas y recurvas talladas a flanco de montaña [...] hasta parar en la minima terminal de Puerto Araguato, con tremendo topetazo de la maquina tardíamente frenada..." (RM, p.275-6).

Following the despot's escape, Prof. Leoncio succeeds him in power in order to be a new defender of North-American interests. Leoncio's attitude concerning the United States is summarized by the author when he indicates that "ha salido una caravana de automóviles para buscarlo" (RM, p.269). This apparently unimportant datum epitomizes the *yanqui* supremacy superseding the old European domination, particularly if we compare it to the Primer Magistrado's escape in the train. The following systematic model makes explicit the relation and opposition between both:



The defeated Primer Magistrado escapes in a train, a vestige of the European economic domination occurring during most of the Nineteenth century. In the meantime, the victorious Leoncio, to whom the North-American government will grant power, is acclaimed by a parade of cars. This means of transportation, the most emblematic characterization of individualism in modern capitalism, begins to be used in the continent, to the detriment of collective transportation systems. Consequently, the use of cars strengthens more and more the North-American economic power in Latin American countries. Leoncio's arrival is, then, an image of his future dependent involvement with the United States.

#### *1.4 The precariousness of the Patriarca's and the Primer Magistrado's power*

Taking into consideration the aspects formerly examined which, incidentally, characterize the structure of a dependent nation, we notice, however, that the dictators depicted by Carpentier and García Márquez eventually prove they are not so mighty as they seem to be. Though they sometimes posit themselves almost as omnipotent beings, they also discern, even if indistinctly, the precariousness of their authority.

To the Patriarca - still dismayed by the disappearance of his beloved Manuela Sánchez - the limits of his power are unequivocally shown by the thought of the feeble nature of his strength, incapable of bringing her back.

"Y él volvió a padecer por un instante el destello clarividente de que no había sido nunca ni sería nunca el dueño de todo su poder, siguió mortificado por el relente de aquella certidumbre amarga" (OP, p.103).

All this power only serves, in fact, to make Manuela disappear, as he uses his unusual ability to create an eclipse of the sun in order to impress the young lady (OP, p.85). The girl, however, vanishes in the shadows of the eclipse and there is no power able to make her reappear.

In his turn, in El Recurso del Método, the Primer Magistrado becomes equally conscious of the evanescence of his power. This is proved when the military attaché asks him "¿Figura usted en el Pequeño Larousse? ¿No?[...] Pues entonces está jodido" (RM, p.293). That afternoon the dictator weeps. He can not accept his shameful omission by the famous dictionary. He, who had been "de los que durante años y años impusieron su voluntad, hicieron la ley, en algún lugar del mundo" (RM, p.332). His power was so great that "bastaba que se acostara en su chinchorro para que ese chinchorro se volviera trono" (*Ibid.*). Yet, he is chagrined by the thought that this overwhelming power is worthless, particularly when he lies moribund "en su horizontalidad de inmortal ignorada por El Pequeño Larousse" (*Ibid.*).

When the dictator becomes conscious of his humiliating triviality, which destroys his dream of immortality through the written word, he finally recognizes that all the power he once controlled was meaningless. Consequently, he

witnesses "su prestigio menguado, con alarmante deterioro de autoridad, tras de cada trácala, por él inventada para permanecer en el poder" (RM, p.122). But he is impotent to do anything which could alter this situation. And, as a crowning humiliation, if some day, in the future, someone - contemplating a statue of him - asks who this man was, "no habrá quien pueda responderles" (RM, p.293).

Hence, we realize that the dictators imagined by García Márquez and Carpentier are aware of the ephemeral character of their power. Even the Patriarca notices the gradually diminishing range of his domination in the course of his long government which stretches for more than a century. A notable example is given by the refined torturer Saenz de la Barra who, faced by the dictator's complaints about the decisions taken by the government without his authorization, replies: "Usted no es el gobierno, general, usted es el poder" (OP, p.214). That is, there happens a strange and improbable dissociation between government and power which weakens the field of action of the latter, as becomes evident in the book. Apparently, arbitrary measures are taken against the Patriarca's will, both outside and inside his country, and he is tied down, with no possibility of preventing them. In my opinion, this aspect clearly indicates that the power structure is not restricted to the person of the dictator but has much wider connections, i.e., not only when one considers the country's internal structure but also when one incorporates the web of external linkages.

Consequently, this section can be concluded by reiterating Galeano's definition of the dictator as a *funcionario* of foreign countries. This is precisely the case of the tyrants described by Carpentier and García Márquez. In the subsequent section I will attempt to prove how, in this respect, Roa Bastos' dictator is the diametrical opposite of the two despots already examined.

## 2. Power and Dependency in 'Yo el Supremo'

In contrast to his fellows delineated in El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, the political manoeuvres carried out by the dictator<sup>16</sup> portrayed in the novel by Roa Bastos evince much more autonomy. While the former two characters struggle to preserve a power which is actually far from being absolute, El Supremo appears to be wrapped in the mantle of a god. Naturally, this assigns him the right to create his own laws to govern the country

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16. It is important to emphasize at this point that in Francia's epoch the acceptation of the term "dictator" was not of "tyrant" or "despot" which is the usual connotation in the present day. As Roa Bastos explained in an interview with Carlos Pacheco, when asked about the relationship between El Recurso del Método, El Otoño del Patriarca and Yo el Supremo: "Creo que la categoría, el rótulo de 'dictador' que se ha dado a esta galería de anti-héroes en la narrativa del poder es inadecuada. La palabra viene de la legislación romana como un título de autoridad constitucional. Es en ese orden que Bolívar y Francia fueron nombrados dictadores y ejercieron constitucionalmente este poder" (In: PACHECO, Carlos. El Escritor es un Productor de Mentiras: Diálogo con Augusto Roa Bastos. Silver Springs, Maryland, April, 1982, mimeo).

according to his idiosyncrasies - a fact the book illustrates abundantly. But the significant difference lies in the fact that his choices neither envisage his own enrichment nor secure personal privileges. On the contrary, he tries to improve the living conditions of the people and to foster social justice, based on his concept of "people": those who are, as he affirms, "fuente del Poder Absoluto, del absolutamente poder" (YES, p.47). The narrative questions, however, through manifold voices, the value of this Absolute Power, whose importance is manifested by the fact that it is always written in capital letters<sup>17</sup>.

The narrative, then, presents a character who, evoking his life, is capable of judging himself, in a sort of posthumous revaluation. This assessment encompasses mainly the period when he governed Paraguay virtually alone during almost three decades, a domination founded upon an uncontested power. Some of the above mentioned voices, for example, criticize him for not having prepared, or even for having prevented, the appearance of other leaders capable of successfully carrying on his work through the years, thus avoiding a traumatic succession.

In the cruel trial at the end of the novel, which will be analysed later in this chapter, he is accused of

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17. One of these voices tells El Supremo the reason for this: Escribes las palabras con mayúsculas para mayor seguridad. Lo único que revelan es tu inseguridad" (YES, p.111).

"Creíste que la Patria que ayudaste a nacer, que la Revolución que salió armada de tu cráneo, empieza -ban-acababan en ti[...] no formaste verdaderos dirigentes sino una plaga de secuaces atraillados a tu sombra" (YES, p.454).

In fact, this is the main argument raised against El Supremo dictator of Paraguay by his critics. In his endeavours to maintain absolute power up to the end of his life-dictatorship, he precludes the eventual formation of a ruling class. Accordingly, when his physician begs him to nominate an acceptable successor he refuses to do it:

"No puedo elegir un designatario, como usted dice. No me he elegido yo. Me ha elegido la mayoría de nuestros conciudadanos. Yo mismo no podría elegir me"[and after his death] "La soberanía, el poder, de que nos hallamos investidos, volverán al pueblo al cual pertenecen de manera imperecedera" (YES, p.135).

If these words demonstrate in some way El Supremo's democratic vocation, his refusal to indicate a successor or, at least, to form a governing élite, capable of implementing the same line of government action after him, caused, in part, the Paraguayan decadence in the decades following his death. Yet, he explains why he blindly insisted on holding all power in his own hands and, as a result, created obstacles for the emergence of potential opponents:

"Nada de competidores. Celosos de mi autoridad, sólo se empeñan en minarla en beneficio de la suya. Cuanto más divida mi poder, más lo debilitaré, y como

sólo quiero hacer el bien, no deseo que nada me impida; siquiera el peor de los males" (YES, p. 367-8, my emphasis).

The Paraguayan dictator's primary aim is thus to guarantee the cohesion and unity of the State apparatus so that some policies can be designed in favour of the majority of the people. Nevertheless, even with this justification, his eagerness for Absolute Power is at least controversial.

The authoritarian regime described in Yo El Supremo is, in my view, in its political delineation similar to some modern so-called socialist democracies where there is an enormous crystallization of power in the hands of a selected ruling élite<sup>18</sup>. Yet, according to the doctrinal lines of these systems, such power should emanate or, at least, be proportionally distributed among the various social groups, under the hegemony of the popular classes. In the same way as these regimes try to rationalize their oppressive policies, alleging prevailing instability caused by internal problems and by the threat of foreign attacks, I understand that the lack of real popular participation and political adherence to Francia's government encounters its justification in that lapse of time which anticipates the necessity of a

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18. For a more detailed analysis and confirmation of this opinion see the debates carried on in ANDREU, Jean et alii. Seminario sobre 'Yo Supremo' de Augusto Roa Bastos. Poitiers, Centre de Recherches Latino-Américaines, Université de Poitiers, 1976.



period of affirmation of power which, it is said, would later return to the people. That is, for the dictator - who presents his viewpoint concerning the situation of his nation - his ruling period is merely circumstantial. Therefore, considering that his main purpose is to develop policies which will eventually benefit the people - even if denying them various basic democratic rights -, I think one can accept and find his form of government partially justified.

### *2.1 El Supremo's power and contemporary dictatorships*

An interesting aspect to be stressed is that the form of power exercised by Francia and described in Yo el Supremo may well be ideologically used to serve the interests of the repressive dictatorships which still exist in some Latin American countries. Incidentally, this was the case with the present Paraguayan dictator, Stroessner, who is said to have enthusiastically welcomed the publication of the book<sup>19</sup>. Understandably, for anyone who makes a rapid

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19. Andreu stressed that "Stroessner trata de recuperar el hombre de estado, figura histórica de independencia, pero en ningún caso lo que es socialista en Francia". In: ANDREU, Jean, "Modalidades del relato en Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos: lo Dicho, el Dictado y el Diktat", in: ANDREU, Jean et alii, op. cit., p.45. Stroessner would later change his view about Yo el Supremo, even to the point of banning it in Paraguay, in 1982. Ruben Bareiro Saguier, Oliver de Leon and Felipe Navarro's interview with Augusto Roa Bastos, "Um escritor em guerra contra o impossível" (in: Folha de São Paulo, São Paulo, 17th June, 1983) also demonstrates this point.

and superficial reading, El Supremo's controversial decisions and systematic vengeance look like nothing more than arbitrary acts, perfectly consonant with a repressive and authoritarian personality. Yet, the analysis of the book in its wider historical perspective proves that El Supremo's beneficial acts largely outnumber the negative ones - facts such as the apparently necessary authoritarian and repressive nature of the government, which surely please the contemporary dictatorships.

Besides, an element that may escape one's attention is that the different accusing voices do not explicitly refer to the time of Francia's dictatorship, but, in most of the cases, to the present-day government. One example, among many, is the reference to Takumbú, a quarry transformed into a prison, where innumerable political prisoners of the present Stroessner regime are gaoled, most of them under forced labour.

"El Takumbú es un cerro muy viejo. Desvaría ya[...] ¿Por qué crees que ponen allí a los prisioneros condenados a trabajos forzados por delitos políticos? El Gran Sapo Tutelar ha mandado extraer las piedras para pavimentar esta maldita ciudad. Asunción quedará empedrada de malos pensamientos" (YES, p.304).

Bareiro Saguier shows how the connotations of the text lead the reader to consider the opposition of attitudes between the two historical moments, El Supremo's time and the present. Both occur within dictatorial parameters.

However, while the former operates as a strict defender of the national sovereignty, the existing regime does not find any social and political justification, having been completely handed over to the penetration of foreign interests<sup>20</sup>. The basic difference between El Supremo and the current despots lies at this point. And the Patriarca and the Primer Magistrado, although not so contemporary as to be properly compared to the present dictatorships, act as if they were products of the same source. El Supremo's procedure, however, is unique, for he is totally opposed to the behaviour of García Márquez and Carpentier's tyrants, who seek personal privileges through actions that end up in disastrous policies for their societies.

We, therefore, observe that although El Supremo can apparently serve as a model for a large range of lamentable dictatorships which proliferate in the continent and which do not show the same social concern, he in fact produced reasonable arguments to legitimize his dictatorial form of government. His principal objective was to protect the new-born nation. And his sometimes blind nationalism was in fact the motive force behind Paraguayan supremacy and social development at the time.

Roa Bastos makes evident in his novel how El Supremo's drive to hold absolute power was channelled to

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20. See BAREIRO SAGUIER, Rubén, "Trayectoria Narrativa de Augusto Roa Bastos", in: Texto Crítico, Vera Cruz, México, year II, number 4, 1976, p.45.

serve Paraguay, forging an independent nation, the most developed in South America at that time. His absolutism was not reactionary as some of his severe critics assert<sup>21</sup> but, in fact, the most efficient manner to promote the nation's development and Paraguayan welfare, according to his view.

## *2.2 Free trade ideology: a new concept of colonization*

Paraguay, at the time of El Supremo, was a truly sovereign country, where any attempt at foreign infiltration to extract its resources was tenaciously fought by the dictator. He resists diplomatic pressure or military adventures by the British who, under the banner of "free trade", succeed in imposing their domination throughout South America - the only exception being Paraguay. El Supremo understands quite well the ultimate purpose of the British Empire. This can be proved when he explains, in detail, their tactics of approaching the colonized countries. That is,

"Si nos acercamos a los sudamericanos como comerciantes y no como enemigos, daremos energía a sus impulsos localistas; de este modo acabaremos por meterlos a todos en nuestra bolsa, pensaron/obraron los gobernantes del Imperio británico dando un brillante ejemplo a sus descendientes de la Nueva Inglaterra" (YES, p. 233).

In this passage Roa Bastos reveals that the

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21. In Chapter 5 I analyse this point in detail.

dictator was perfectly aware of the consequences brought about by this free, but unequal, trade imposed by the metropolis. It would inevitably create a *coterie* of privileged persons tied to interests totally opposed to the rest of the population. Precisely because Francia knew what this so-called free trade doctrine would in practice mean for an incipient economy, which he desperately tried to maintain free of dominant foreign articulations, he rejects it. He was conscious of the fact that if the official barriers for the import of commodities were suspended, those produced in Paraguay would soon vanish from the markets because of an unbalanced competition. It would rapidly mean the disappearance of the national industrial sector. As for agriculture, already reasonably organized through the Country Farms to supply the country's necessity of food staples, it would soon turn its productive forces to export crops, thus surrendering to the demands of the external markets. In short, and relying upon a historical analogy, it would make Paraguay as dependent on England as it was on Spain before the 1811 revolution.

The *dominación indirecta* or *independencia protegida* (YES, p.239) advocated by the British was already established by that time in most of the South American countries. The obstinate resistance shown by Paraguay was then an example hardly attractive to British diplomacy. Moreover, as El Supremo was the first follower in the continent of the positivist motto "Order and Progress", its strict

observation, added to a fierce nationalism, made the country rapidly develop within a framework of political and social peace noticeably absent in other regions. In order to fight this stubborn hostility to foreign influence, the English Crown decides to stimulate an operation which would subdue Paraguay through a puppet State - in this case, Argentina. Buenos Aires had already firmly adhered to this new form of colonization which, in the last instance, was the end result of "free trade". As Pomer affirms,

"Na Argentina, a oligarquia agro-exportadora não vacilará em reformular toda a economia do país, transformando-a num apêndice da Grã-Bretanha. Produzirá o que a metrópole exige, e autorizará uma rede ferroviária que, saindo do porto de Buenos Aires, se estenderá por todas as áreas produtivas de cereais e carnes. Este país, em decorrência disto, vai crescer de forma anárquica e acabará por apresentar monstruosas deformações, com províncias pobres e províncias ricas, com produções altamente desenvolvidas ao lado de outras inteiramente primitivas. O país crescerá obedecendo a interesses e necessidades que não são os de seu povo. Isto se dará por imposição coercitiva da grande potência central, em conluio com grupos sociais do país, dispostos a aceitarem tal imposição, com a contrapartida de receberem parcela da riqueza que tal deformação vai gerar"<sup>22</sup>.

### 2.2.1 The *Porteños* annexationist manoeuvres

The distinct difference between Buenos Aires and Paraguay, concerning their social objectives, appears

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22. POMER, León. Paraguai, nossa guerra contra esse soldado. São Paulo, Centro Editorial Latinoamericano, 197?, p.12.

clearly in several episodes of the novel. The most remarkable one, from my viewpoint, is the *expedición auxiliadora* headed by two men in charge of Argentine interests, Belgrano and Echevarría<sup>23</sup>. Though not explicitly formulated in the book, the main target of this operation lies clearly in the annexation of Paraguay by the Buenos Aires central government. However, Francia is quick to perceive the secret plan of subjugation. The passage serves to demonstrate how El Supremo defends an independent path for Paraguay, by urging it to continue being "una República independiente y soberana" (YES, p.221). As an alternative to the Argentine project the Paraguayan ruler offers the Buenos Aires' agents "el proyecto de una Confederación, la única forma que hará viable esta confraternidad de Estados libres, sin que la unión signifique anexión" (Ibid.). However, his suggestion is apparently not backed by the *porteños* and Francia has to be firm not only against their veiled attacks on Paraguayan sovereignty but also against the enthusiasm the annexation initiative arouses in the *creme de la creme* of Assunción society.

"Los huéspedes son objeto de delicadas atenciones por parte de las principales familias. Muchas fiestas en su honor. Saraos, paseos, mareos, envites, convites. [...] Los más conspicuos faccionarios de la 'unión' visitan asiduamente a Belgrano y Echevarría" (YES, p.222).

El Supremo is conscious of the fact that the proposed union of Paraguay with Buenos Aires would

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23. See Yo El Supremo, op. cit., p.220-247.

eventually mean the formation of a system which would guarantee economic and political benefit for one social class only, favouring mechanisms that would mean a more unequal social structure. He also knows that the Paraguayan élite supports the idea of a union, coveting the privileges that would certainly result from it. This is the reason why Francia would persist in personally controlling the situation then created, in particular by accompanying the *porteños* everywhere during their visit. The curious outcome of this peregrination and daily contacts with the two foreigners is his growing admiration for Belgrano. This appreciation later changing into friendship, the dictator would then feel confident to establish long and open-hearted conversations with him. This happens when Echevarría, whom El Supremo undoubtedly despises, is not present. Francia tries to convince General Belgrano about the problems which would inevitably result from this second submission of Paraguay to a foreign power:

"Al virreinato le aconteció por dos veces consecutivas, lo que al Paraguay hubo de ocurrirle una sola. Por lo menos mientras yo viva. Belgrano parpadeó sin entender. Los ingleses, mi estimado general, invadieron el Plata en una típica operación pirata para apoderarse de los caudales que la recaudación alcabalera de Chile y Perú había acumulado en el puerto de Buenos Aires" (YES, p.232).

Belgrano, in his turn, has to agree with Francia that the five million silver coins produced by the exaction



referred to were indeed appropriated by the British in connivance with the Viceroy of Buenos Aires. The buccaneers shared out the money among themselves and the rest was sent to His Majesty, the King of England . Thus,

"La operación de pillage se convirtió en una empresa política. Vista la facilidad con la que un puñado de hombres decididos, sin exagerados escrúpulos, se apoderó del rico botín, los ingleses debieron pensar que podían reemplazar a los españoles en el Gobierno de la Colonia, aunque fuera bajo el signo de la 'independencia protegida' " (YES, p.232).

As already observed, this second subjugation of Argentina by a foreign power can count on the support of local groups who would be the real beneficiaries of such a plan. El Supremo rejects union with the neighbouring country on the grounds that it would lead to the loss of the recently achieved Paraguayan economic and political autonomy. Using an analogy, he reveals to Belgrano that he is deeply concerned by the increasing social inequality created by foreign domination:

"Jefes y oficiales invasores son hospedados en casonas de las clases respetables. Se abre la libertad de culto y de comercio con el país pirata. El patriciado se entusiasma con los jabones de olor que vienen de Londres. Magra compensación para los porteños. Naturalmente la perfumada espuma no llega a la chusma de los arrabales. Pardos, mulatos y gauchos no huelen más que la creciente fermentación de su descontento" (YES, p.232).

El Supremo knew that if the free trade agreements

were implemented, the high-income markets of Paraguay would be flooded with superfluous commodities, thus producing an economic area of problematic consequences, formed by articles of conspicuous consumption, as was happening in Buenos Aires. As seen in the excerpt above, El Supremo emphasizes the example of the perfumed soaps available only to a few people, who would, in similar ways, spend the whole of the national finance. In contrast to this socially disastrous allocation of the national income, most of the population would not have the means for acquiring the goods necessary for their minimum daily survival.

It is important to underline, at this point, that the annexationist mission of Belgrano and Echevarría in Paraguay occurs when Francia's power is not yet consolidated. At the time it happens he is only a member of the Government Council presided by Fulgencio Yegros, bearing the title of *vocal decano*. But on this occasion he is already opposed to the planned association with Buenos Aires, nourishing the idea of transforming his country into a really independent republic. Later, in this study, I will demonstrate again how, during his long rule, he persists in defending unabashed this independence and autonomy.

2.2.2 The annexationist attempts spread through  
a colonial chain

Besides the Argentine and British annexationist

endeavours, El Supremo is also impelled to fight against the attacks of Brazil at the time of the Empire. Particularly through the Brazilian envoy, Correia da Câmara, the attempts at the incorporation of Paraguay by the huge neighbouring country are clearly discerned. This topic, however, will be examined in detail at the end of this study<sup>24</sup>. This theme will be addressed when I engage in historical analysis concerning the relation between past, present and future, as there is a very significant interweaving of these temporal dimensions in the subject concerned. I will attempt to prove that Manoel Correia da Câmara was, at the time, the embodiment of continuing Brazilian efforts to subjugate Paraguay, a process actually still occurring in modern times. In addition, I will try to reveal the links between the past and present which the insertion of Correia da Câmara establishes in the narrative.

Given these threats, El Supremo assembled all the forces he could summon to resist every movement which could menace the independence of the country. I have already given an account of how he reacts in the face of the attempts to subdue Paraguay made by the imperialist British metropolis and neighbouring colonized countries. The dictator, in fact, fears the diffusion of the chain of dependence, mentioned by Gunder Frank, in a well-known passage:

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24. The topic is investigated in Chapter 5, section "Brazilian imperialism", p.292.

"The capitalist system has a colonial structure through which the imperialist metropolis exploits its Latin American and other colonies and through which - through 'internal colonialism' - the national metropolises of Latin America exploit their provincial centers, and these in turn their respective hinterlands, in a colonial chain that extends without a break from the imperialist center out to the most isolated rural region of Latin America and other underdeveloped countries"<sup>25</sup>.

Therefore, the most remarkable aspect when one examines the relation between power and dependency in Yo el Supremo concerns the effective war El Supremo wages in order to defend the political autonomy and the economic independence of Paraguay. He orders the motto "Independence or Death" to be inscribed in the tricolor ribbon on the army's uniform caps (YES, p.418 and p.195) meaning that, for him, the sovereignty of the country is an absolute social value, placed above everything.

### 2.2.3 Isolationism

As a result of these imperialist manoeuvres, it is only natural that the Paraguayan ruler is compelled to adopt an isolationist policy. This occurs because Paraguay is the target of different types of aggression: plunder by Brazilian expeditions, the *Bandeiras*, and threats of invasion by *porteños*, Uruguayans and even by Simon Bolivar (YES, p.324-5).

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25. See GUNDER FRANK, André. Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution. New York, Montly Review Press, 1970, p.373.

This gradual isolation is caused not only by those political constraints but also by the Buenos Aires decision to exact extortionate charges in order to allow the flow of Paraguay's products through Argentina. As a land-locked country, Paraguay's development was obviously hindered by these high taxes. Nevertheless, there were also other reasons, which explain this political encroachment on Paraguay, e.g., the violent internal struggles and an ensuing climate of disorder and anarchy in the neighbouring countries, apart from their foreign expansionist strategies. In fact, some authors, such as Fournial, even question if El Supremo could be blamed for his attitude of aloofness in relation to the affairs of other countries:

" No cabria preguntarse si quien aisla en realidad al Paraguay es el Supremo o sus revueltos e inquietantes vecinos?"<sup>26</sup>.

Nevertheless, the point is that the closure of the frontiers was somewhat beneficial as it eventually turned Paraguay into a self-sufficient economy.

In the essay "Yo el Supremo: una verdadera revolución novelesca", Turton compares this Latin American classic by Roa Bastos to Ulysses by Joyce. Drawing a parallel between the two writers' native lands which served as a back-

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26. FOURNIAL, Georges, "José Gaspar de Francia, el Robespierre de la Independencia Americana", in: ANDREU, Jean et alii. Seminário sobre 'Yo el Supremo' de Augusto Roa Bastos, op. cit., p.16.

ground to their fiction, he demonstrates that Ireland also experienced domination by a neighbouring country. The critic asserts, following well-known analyses by Marx<sup>27</sup>, that the English economic occupation and political domination could be seen as the focal cause of the lasting poverty felt by large sectors of the Irish population, in particular the peasants who were systematically driven away from their land, repeating a historical process of social expropriation typical of the development of capitalism in Britain. In addition to that, London enforced an economic policy which inhibited the development of native industry. Present day Paraguay, keeping in mind the inadequacies of historical analogies, is very similar to Ireland at that period - the South American country shows a social and economic structure notably marked by widespread poverty, social inequalities, an economy characterized by stagnation, and a dependent relationship with foreign countries, Brazil in particular.

While comprising the whole period of Francia's government and even the complete history of Paraguay, Roa Bastos' novel discloses that the only time in which the country could be called independent, in an economic sense, was during El Supremo's dictatorship. His successors, Carlos

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27. TURTON, Peter, "Yo el Supremo: una verdadera revolución novelesca" (mimeo). The author quotes Marx and Engels on Ireland. Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1971, p.313.

López (1840-1862) and Solano López (1862-1870) still tried to preserve the transformation Francia had struggled to achieve in Paraguay. Nevertheless, after the war of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870), the foundations of a slow but persistent decadence of the country were laid, a deplorable process of changing a proud country into another South American *republiqueta*.

### *2.3 The consequences of absolute power*

After analysing what is El Supremo's avowed objective in investing himself with absolute power - that is, to secure the true independence of his country - it is my intention now to discuss in detail what is the precise nature of this power. It could initially be described as an immense tree:

"El gigantesco árbol del Poder Absoluto. Alguien viene con el hacha. Lo derriba. Deja un tendal. Sobre el gran aplastamiento crece otro. No acabará esta especie maligna de la Sola-Persona hasta que la Persona-Muchedumbre suba en derecho de sí a imponer todo su derecho sobre lo torcido y venenoso de la especie humana" (YES, p.290).

This allegory is only meaningful if we consider the extent of El Supremo's power and his reiterated democratic intentions. Although his authority is apparently totalitarian - because it takes the form of a one-man

government - its purpose is actually to prepare the necessary bases for the people (*Persona-Muchedumbre*) to assume power.

Yet, it should not be forgotten that Roa Bastos' literary construction actually constitutes a kind of self-defence for the dictator. The book incisively repels the accusations directed against him by his coevals and also by other later assessments. These critical judgements generally disregard the special circumstances surrounding El Supremo's government. Fournial emphasizes that

"Para juzgar 'El Supremo' debemos situar su obra y su vida en el tiempo y la región del mundo terriblemente perturbada a la sazón donde le tocó vivir. Lo que nos obligará más que matizar las opiniones hasta ahora formadas arbitrariamente"<sup>28</sup>.

Roa Bastos' arguments turn many of these opinions upside down, proving how much they were warped by ideological elements other than the pure account of the truth<sup>29</sup>. Still, the Paraguayan writer never adopts a manichean and dogmatic position and Francia's errors are described unsparingly. Casabianca points out that Yo el Supremo "pinta el claro oscuro de aquel tiempo difícil" in which, within a socially-minded framework, there

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28. FOURNIAL, Georges, op. cit., p.8.

29. For further details about the historians' common view on Francia, see Chapter 5.



were blatant manifestations of arbitrary measures and oppressive State policies which prevented the recognition of some popular demands, in particular greater access to the high echelons of the State apparatus. However, he underlines, "los aspectos sombríos de la dictadura del doctor Francia no anulan su carácter progresista para su tiempo"<sup>30</sup>.

### 2.3.1 Roa Bastos' worldview in the recreation of the principal character

Notwithstanding the fact that the novel is mainly an account of El Supremo as a statesman, constituting in fact a defence, that is, an attempt to rehabilitate him *vis-à-vis* official history and also to justify his authoritarian power, it is, however, necessary to remember the obvious fact that the book was written by an author laden with a cultural and ideological baggage which certainly becomes manifest in his writings. That is, Roa Bastos used the citizen José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia only as a point of departure. The dictator and his time compounded a scenario from which Roa Bastos created a literary character who reflects the author's concept of the world and his vision of macro social processes. Thus, I agree with Pacheco's "irreverence", when he declares that

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30. CASABIANCA, Carlos, "La 'dictadura' del Dr. Francia en Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos", in ANDREU, Jean et alii. Seminario sobre 'Yo el Supremo' de Augusto Roa Bastos, op. cit., p.60.

"El correlato referencial histórico de El Supremo no es el Dr. Francia, que en paz descansen sus atormen-  
tados huesos: sino, más bien, una imagen ideológico-  
cultural, un vasto, conflictivo y cambiante construc-  
to conformado por múltiples discursos culturales. El  
novelista no mira un objeto histórico terminado y  
determinado, empírico, carnal; sino que lee esa medú-  
sica imagen cultural siempre en movimiento que se le  
ofrece, incondicional y anhelante como materia  
prima informe"<sup>31</sup>.

Accordingly, the Francia we are introduced to  
in the text is a figurative character, who embodies a  
complexity probably unknown in the real historical  
individual, as he is infused with the author's worldview.  
If the novel intends to present Francia's justification for  
acts and attitudes he adopted during his term of government,  
it also assumes, sometimes, the character of a vivid  
denunciation. I believe that the principal accusation by the  
author appears in the last pages of the book (YES, p.453-4),  
during the afore mentioned trial. This passage seems to me  
to be of extreme importance, if a political appraisal of  
the Francia government is sought. It is the single passage  
where Roa Bastos explicitly charges his character, *El Supremo  
Dictador*<sup>32</sup>. The weight of these accusatory words is increased  
because of their strategic position, placed at the end of

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31. Pacheco's opinion was set out in a lecture he gave in the Centro de  
Estudios Latinoamericanos "Rómulo Gallegos", in Caracas, 1982,  
under the title of "Algunas notas irreverentes sobre la narrativa  
de la dictadura" (mimeo., p.5).

32. For a confirmation of this, see SICARD's opinion in ANDREU, Jean et  
alii. Seminário sobre 'Yo el Supremo' de Augusto Roa Bastos, op.  
cit., p.122.

the narrative. Perhaps they lend the book a special dimension contradicting the favourable account of Francia's deeds exposed in the preceding pages<sup>33</sup>. In my view, the position of the powerful ruler, now in the defendants' corner, is actually intended to provide a proper historical purview, i.e., to show the "other side of the coin". That is, if on the one hand the character reports about his work in the major part of the text in order to justify his acts, on the other he questions, *post-mortem*, their social validity and historical necessity. "The novel parades the ghosts of a past in which Dr. Francia reads only his good intentions but which now comes to haunt him with monstrous truths", explains Franco<sup>34</sup>. These truths are significant especially because they are pronounced when the character is no longer able to defend himself from their heavy charge. However, I suppose they do not incriminate the dictator for his acts in themselves, but for not having known how to transform them into a truly revolutionary outcome.

In order to indicate, then, the logical arguments that support such a conclusion, I start by quoting some of these imputations made against El Supremo:

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33. Perhaps this has been the reason for the mistaken opinions about Yo el Supremo which I have mentioned in the Introduction.

34. FRANCO, Jean, "Paranoia in Paraguay", in: The Times Literary Supplement, London, number 295, 25th August, 1975.

"Te alucinaste y alucinaste a los demás fabulando que tu poder era absoluto[...] Dejaste de creer en Dios pero tampoco creíste en el pueblo con la verdadera mística de la Revolución; única que lleva a un verdadero conductor a identificarse con su causa; no a usarla como escondrijo de su absoluta vertical Persona, en la que ahora pastan horizontalmente los gusanos. Con grandes palabras, con grandes dogmas aparentemente justos, cuando ya la llama de la Revolución se había apagado en ti, seguiste engañando a tus conciudadanos con las mayores bajezas, con la astucia más ruin y perversa, la de la enfermedad y la senectud[...] Te convertiste para la gente-muchedumbre en una Gran Oscuridad; en el gran Don-Amo que exige docilidad a cambio del estómago lleno y la cabeza vacía. Ignorancia de un tiempo de encrucijada" (YES, p.454, my emphasis).

The "crossroads in time" clearly means that there should be a necessary change in the policies adopted by the dictator, since an impasse in the political process had been reached. His program should no longer remain stationary as if in the "middle of the open road". But what is stressed is the fact that this path, industriously built, should lead to a new and promising route, adequate to the revolutionary tenets of the mentor of the Paraguayan revolution. It seems to me that although this accusation appears to be a criticism directed at Francia, it constitutes, in fact, an evaluation from the perspective of the writer's present time. That is, Roa Bastos, writing in the 1970's, conceptualizes the revolution as a social process whose development and end results are obviously different from El Supremo's way of understanding it in his epoch, more than

one and a half centuries ago<sup>35</sup>.

Some of these arguments - or "ghosts of the past" mentioned by Franco - are raised by Roa Bastos. Even if the author concedes that the virtual abolition of hunger in Paraguay was a great achievement of El Supremo, he can not understand the fact that the latter created obstacles for the improvement of higher educational and cultural areas, which made the dictator eventually see himself surrounded by empty heads. At this point we arrive at a crucial moment in the author-character relation. The criticism raised by the former concerning the latter does not seem to be directed towards what the dictator did but especifically to what he did not do. El Supremo reached a point at which he did not know how to push forward his revolutionary project. His governmental agenda was all focussed upon the virtual necessity of defending Paraguay from outside assaults, the safeguard of this target being a strict social cohesion. Consequently, he sometimes disregarded some basic rules of civil rights characteristic of modern times. Still according to Roa Bastos' censure, at the end of his government his decrepitude would extinguish in him "the flame of the Revolution". Now a doddering man, he could not continue to be the head of the

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35. Irala Burgos explains that for El Supremo the dictatorship was "una exigencia histórica para el fortalecimiento de aquel pacto que debía conducir al Paraguay, en la ideología del Dictador, a transformar las relaciones sociales de producción con la auto-capitalización del país" (In: BURGOS, Adriano Irala, "El horizonte ideológico en Yo el Supremo", in Comentarios sobre 'Yo el Supremo', Assunción, Ediciones Club del Libro, 1975, number 1, p.52). Consequently, I understand that Francia's idea of "revolution" does not fill completely the Marxist parameters of Roa Bastos.

nation, but, even so, he tries to persist in it.

The author follows with his criticism summarizing how he conceives the revolution:

"No, pequeña momia; la verdadera revolución no devora a sus hijos. Únicamente a sus bastardos; a los que no son capaces de llevarla hasta sus últimas consecuencias. Hasta más allá de sus límites si es necesario" (YES, p.454-5).

Considering the immediate connotation of these words, the first sentence of the above quotation certainly refers to the gloomy fact that El Supremo's body is now just nourishment for the worms. This happens as a punishment for his incapacity to drive the revolutionary process to its ultimate consequences which would provoke a radical social transformation. Examining, however, the full meaning of these words in relation to the book as a whole, it is possible that this judgement implies that the dictator's action sought in fact firmly to develop a broad basis for the revolution. At the same time, nevertheless, the existence of his almost ubiquitous power prevented the people from attaining all their political potentialities.

### 2.3.2 "Am I not the Supreme Pelican"?

Without considering the other critical voices which may be heard throughout the narrative, I maintain that

the maxim "the true revolution does not devour its children" is well illustrated by a curious example: El Supremo's conversation with the dog Heroe (YES, p.142). In this excerpt the dictator recalls a particular characteristic of the pelican which appears in Leonardo da Vinci's Bestiary. The bird is portrayed as a loving father which, when returning to the nest finds its nestlings bitten by a snake. At once, it furiously tears its own bosom with its bill trying desperately to resuscitate them with its blood. The dictator then asks: "- ¿No soy yo en Paraguay el Supremo Pelícano?" (Ibid.). With cruel perspicacity Heroe answers him: "- Vucencia ama tanto a sus hijos como la pelícano-madre, los acaricia con tanto fervor que los mata" (Ibid.).

Yet, Heroe goes further with his criticisms. He proceeds to compare the pelican to the definition of a tyrant laid down in Siete Partidas, by Alfonso the Wise, King of Castilla y León,

"Tyrano, dijo el rey sabio, es aquel que con el pretexto del progreso, bienestar y prosperidad de los gobernados, substituye el culto de su pueblo por el de su propia persona. Así se constituye en un falaz y peligroso pelícano. Su infernal arteria, convierte en esclavos los hombres que dice liberar. Los transforma en peces. Los va embuchando en bolsa rojiza que le cuelga del insaciable pico" (YES, p.142).

In relation to the pelican as a voracious fish swallower, the sentence I have quoted in the previous section, "La verdadera Revolución no devora a sus hijos"

(YES, p.454), can be interpreted in all its critical dimension. In these two passages which, in a way, complement each other, one can find the condemnation of Francia's patronizing behaviour. He is accused of having underestimated the people's capacity for deciding the course of their own destiny. The dictator's absolute power suffocated any attempt by the people to become the heirs of their own action and, accordingly, they were submitted to his orders without any chance of ever questioning them.

Perhaps his patronizing posture is due to the low level of cultural and political consciousness existing in the epoch. But even so this internal process of social exclusion is something unexpected in someone like El Supremo, who aspired to carry out a true revolution. Yet, I still believe that his behaviour is actually more similar to the interpretation of the Pelican based in da Vinci's painting than to the one given by the meddlesome dog who, by the way, belongs to the Robertson brothers<sup>36</sup>.

History has demonstrated that Francia really endeavoured to defend and protect his people from the attacks of the "snakes". He offered them his own blood which, even if only a metaphor, shows that his lifetime was truly dedicated to the Paraguayan people. If the effect of his acts sometimes tended to be like the pelican-mother, which kills her children with excessive tenderness,

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36. The Robertsons created a myth about the person of El Supremo. Their view of Paraguay as a "kingdom of terror" was propagated through their writings. Then, it would be expected that their dog would have a low opinion of the dictator.



asphyxiating them and impeding their own efforts to learn to fly, it happened only through a bona fide lack of knowledge about which, socially speaking, was the fairer direction to follow. Or, as I have earlier mentioned, to the "ignorance at a crossroads in time".

### 3. Concluding Remarks

The intention of this chapter was to focus upon aspects of power and dependency appearing in the dictator novels of Roa Bastos, Carpentier and García Márquez. Through the examination of the three books I have tried to determine the scope of differences and similarities in relation to the attitude of the dictators concerned when faced with the demands of government.

While the despots depicted in El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca clearly demonstrate that their primary and genuine objective is the preservation of their own power, regardless of the fact that it means the surrender of their own land to foreign countries, El Supremo's history shows a totally opposed configuration from his fictional counterparts. His efforts are directed precisely at avoiding his country's dependency upon alien mechanisms and its autonomous process of development being threatened not only by international imperialism but also by neighbouring nations.

Precisely because these characters present such distinct traits, I decided to draw a parallel between them. Seeking to elucidate this difference, however, I carried out the analysis in separate sections of the chapter. The first one was devoted to the study of the Primer Magis -trado and the Patriarca, who are similar in many respects. And the second one was the examination of Roa Bastos' El Supremo, whose absolute power, although aimed at benefitting the people, has also been the object of much controversy. I have tried to prove that the three dictators' political power which seems to be, at the first glance, unlimited, is in fact used differently by the characters analysed.

I conclude, therefore, by saying that, in the light of the study, power in itself is not necessarily always a resource used to the detriment of those who do not possess it. It may even be socially beneficial, as was, generally speaking, the work of El Supremo. However, the concentration of power is usually evil and corrupt, creating a multitude of histories of injustice in which Latin America abounds. This is the case of the dictators created by Carpentier and García Márquez, inasmuch as they exclude all the population from any form of access to power, and utilize it to implement processes of social expropriation, thus seeking to benefit only their own interests.

## C H A P T E R    2

### ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS OF POWER: SOLITUDE, THE DOUBLE AND VIOLENCE

This chapter intends to investigate other aspects of the power configuration appearing in the novels Yo el Supremo, El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca. I examine such topics as the relation between power and solitude, the role of the double and the inherent violence in the exercise of unequally-distributed power, including, in the latter, a short analysis of *machismo*.

The first theme, i.e., the study of the relationship between the dictators' pursuit of power and their ensuing solitude shows it as a necessary and immediate consequence of despotism and could be hypothesized as "the price of power". The social relations in which the three dictators analysed are engaged clearly show this inter-personal vacuum and they suffer it in an intense manner. This section attempts to reveal the origins of this solitude.

The subsequent aspect refers to the role of the double who, significantly enough, appears in the three novels, though in a varying degree of importance within the literary context. The ultimate purpose of the double is to intensify the power held by the dictators. The narrative shows his instrumental role in guaranteeing the tyrants a longer stay in command of their nations.

The following element of power which I examine is the manifestation of violence. I demonstrate, then, that a situation of power concentration is only intelligible if associated with the recourse to violent measures or the use of force. However, it is emphasized that such a violent dimension occurs as much in the exploitation of the poor by the powerful, such as in the proletarian/capitalist relation, as in the oppressive social role played by men with regard to women, generally speaking. I have, thus, included a specific section to deal with *machismo* as a form of violence.

#### 1. The Inevitable Solitude of a Concentrated Power

"El tiempo incontable de nuestras tiranías es repetitivamente monótono y sólo por el humor y la poesía conservamos la dimensión humana en medio de tanta angustiosa soledad"<sup>1</sup>.

When one starts to analyse the relation between

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1. In: PALAU DE NEMES, Graciela, "Gabriel García Márquez: El Otoño del Patriarca", Hispanoamérica: Revista de Literatura, Buenos Aires, volumes 11-12, 1975, p.183.

solitude and the nature of power, the novel which is immediately singled out is El Otoño del Patriarca. This is so because the theme and its literary articulation by García Márquez - who once declared that he was writing "un gran poema sobre la soledad del poder"<sup>2</sup> - may be clearly perceived in his earlier and most celebrated fictional work. Cien Años de Soledad, as the very title implies, contains in the idea of solitude the essential preoccupation of the author, who brilliantly exposed the causes and consequences of the irreparable solitude of a family, in a story spanning a century. Yet, it could be also pointed out that even in his fictional work preceding the famous 1967 novel, the portrayal of the wretchedness of human solitude has always been a remarkable characteristic of the Colombian writer. For example, from his literary production prior to El Otoño del Patriarca, the characters typical of this contextual development are the colonel of El Coronel no Tiene Quien le Escriba, the mayor of La Mala Hora and, particularly, Colonel Aureliano Buendía of Cien Años de Soledad. All of them experienced the misery of loneliness, and it is reasonable, in the scope of those books, to associate their solitude with the power they wield.

These antecedents, obviously, make us immediately think about the loneliness of the Patriarca but, even here, this situation appears as relative, if compared

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2. Apud GONZÁLEZ BERMEJO, Ernesto, "Ahora doscientos años de soledad", in his Cosas de Escritores. Montevideo, Biblioteca de Marcha, 1971, p.34.

to the other dictators. Without having the intention of establishing a yardstick to measure a supposed degree of solitude affecting the dictators investigated here, I nevertheless consider very appropriate the evaluation of El Supremo made by Benedetti. The Uruguayan writer emphasizes that perhaps "no exista (al menos, en la región literaria) un poderoso más solo, más obstinadamente solo, que El Supremo"<sup>3</sup>.

Along with the Patriarca and El Supremo could be placed Carpentier's Primer Magistrado. He also suffers an oppressive solitude caused by his absolute power and, therefore, it may perhaps be asserted that this problematical situation affects all power holders. It seems that in the same proportion as the "amount" of power becomes more tangible and effective, the greater is the degree of solitude of these authoritarian statesmen. For this reason, it is a logical corollary that their deeply-felt loneliness could certainly be viewed as the price paid in exchange for their enormous concentration of power.

Examining the solitude of the dictators, it is a vital necessity to define, initially, which are the causes of this frustration, that is, the reasons why these powerful men feel irreparably lonely.

In 1971, interviewed by González-Bermejo, García Márquez declared that, notwithstanding the extra -

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3. BENEDETTI, Mario. El Recurso del Supremo Patriarca. Mexico, Nueva Imagen, 1979, p.27.

ordinary amount of critical study devoted to Cien Años de Soledad, he regretted that none of the published analyses had mentioned anything about the aspect which most interested him when he wrote the book. The point he considered inextricably fundamental in the novel was to demonstrate that solitude is the necessary opposite of solidarity<sup>4</sup>. Within this antinomy, solitude is the negation of solidarity, i.e., it results, in fact, from the lack of solidarity, thus indicating that the author was preoccupied with the political connotation of the term. The Buendías constitute a notable illustration of this lack of solidarity, since the absence of any form of social empathy makes them feel increasingly lonely, more and more confined to their inner thoughts, more and more opposed to taking part in a wider society. We may observe, for instance, the continuing recurrence of incestuous practices among the members of the family<sup>5</sup>. This significant fact proves their lack of inter -

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4. GONZÁLEZ BERMEJO, Ernesto, op. cit., p.27.

5. Gallagher explains that "the incest taboo is of course normally thought to exist in primitive societies because incest precludes communication between various groups of kin, and is therefore a hindrance to social cohesion. If women are kept in the family for sexual ends and not offered as wives to other groups of kin, the opportunity is lost of cementing an alliance with another family through a binding marriage contract. Now it should not be forgotten that the novel is, as the title remind us, a novel about one hundred years of 'solitude' and therefore it is about the failure to communicate, a failure to establish social relations that bedevils all of its characters". In: GALLAGHER, David P. Modern Latin American Literature. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.161.

action with other social groups and, like a vicious circle, it ensures their solitude individually and within the Buendía clan.

According to Paz's reasoning in El Laberinto de la Soledad, solitude stems mainly from the inherent incapacity for love. Paz points out that all men sporadically feel lonely at some moment or other of their lives. He also indicates that, as social beings, humankind struggles to abolish this loneliness, which is ultimately "el fondo último de la condición humana". Thus, the feeling of loneliness has a double meaning: on the one hand it implies that human beings are conscious of themselves, their reality is not merely instinctive, but on the other this sensation also suggests that there exists the desire of coming out of one - self, since "el hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y el único ser que es búsqueda de otro"<sup>6</sup>.

Still related to Cien Años de Soledad, Gullón stressed that there is only one way of transcending this possibly fatal solitude: love. But love, he maintains, is precarious and leads to catastrophes, in the hundred years covered by the book. The Buendías' incapacity for love is the sole reason for their solitude which is "vocación impuesta por el nacimiento, fidelidad a una ley, marca imborrable"<sup>7</sup>

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6. See PAZ, Octavio. El Laberinto de la Soledad. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976, p.175.

7. GULLÓN, Ricardo. García Márquez o el Olvidado Arte de Contar. Madrid, Taurus, 1970, p.39 and 36.



and, undoubtedly, reflects their lack of solidarity. We then note that solitude is the *leitmotif* of García Márquez's novels, most commonly characterized as the non-existence of mutual support among the protagonists and their loveless nature.

### *1.1 The lonely power of the Patriarca*

Next, I will centre my investigation on García Márquez's novel which is, given the thematic content above analysed, somehow similar to the books by Carpentier and Roa Bastos. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Patriarca assembled so much power in the course of his political mandate that - paradoxically - this fact impeded his ability to govern. However, if we analyse this aspect in the light of the author's previous work, and view the dictator's solitude as something deriving from his complete inability to love, we shall understand better this political concept of absence of solidarity allied to the rampant desire for absolute power.

At the end of his incredibly long life, the dictator formally recognizes what actually had become clear throughout the novel:

"había conocido su incapacidad de amor en el enigma de la palma de sus manos mudas y en las cifras invisibles de las barajas y había tratado de compensar aquel destino infame con el culto abrasador del vicio solitario del poder" (OP, p.269).

This quotation is very significant, but in my opinion this process occurs in a reverse way. His incapacity for love and the consequent solitude, for reasons explained below, is the result of his solitary vice of power, and not its cause.

From the beginning to the end of the novel, the author often reiterates images of old age allied to the idea of someone inscrutable, fathomless, petrified, when he describes the Patriarca<sup>8</sup>. The use of such adjectives obviously serves the purpose of clarifying some aspects which may be immediately linked to the lonely state of the character, certainly emphasized by those qualifications. In my view, the Patriarca's impenetrable physiognomy denotes a lack of humane feelings which inhibit any affectionate manifestations from those around him, increasing, therefore, his aloneness. The expressive words "stone", "granite", "cement" - used to describe the immutable appearance of his face - indicate that there is no tangible possibility of averting the barrier of social incommunicability which surrounds the solitary despot.

The picture represented in the story is, therefore, one of a man who gradually became familiar with his

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8. See examples of this in El Otoño del Patriarca: "anciano crepuscular" (p.18), "anciano imprevisto" (p.77), "anciano insondable" (p.99 and 227), "anciano herrumbroso" (p.107), "anciano granítico" (p.145), "anciano que parecía de piedra" (p.162), "anciano pétreo" (p.164), "anciano indescifrable" (p.166), "anciano sombrío" (p.174), "anciano inescrutable" (p.180), "él permanecía impassible" (p.183), "enorme buey de cemento" (p.265).

inescapable loneliness, which stems from his enormous greed for power. The tyrant's eagerness for an omnipresent and undisputable power repels, in consequence, intentions of solidarity found in any human relationship. As a result, his unrestrained ambition for power isolates him more and more from the rest of his people.

The narrative is marked by this aura of solitude. At the very beginning of the novel, for example, Patricio Aragonés' pungent remark about the ruler's deplorable manner of having intercourse with his concubines reveals, in part, the Patriarca's failure to establish any normal human relationship. Nevertheless, the dictator is not prepared sincerely to accept his double's critical remark. He believes it to be the mere ingratitude of a man whom he allowed to live as a king, even providing him "lo que nadie le ha dado a nadie en este mundo hasta prestarte mis propias mujeres" (OP, p.28). But Aragonés retorts,

"mejor no hablemos de eso mi general que vale más estar capado a mazo que andar tumbando madres por el suelo como si fuera cuestión de herrar novillas[...] que ponen sus cuerpos de vacas muertas para que uno cumpla con su deber mientras ellas siguen pelando papas[...] sólo a usted se le ocurre creer que esa vaina es amor mi general porque es lo único que conoce" (OP, p.28, my emphasis).

For the general, who, oddly enough, executes this ritual fully dressed and even wearing his boots, this

is the single possible manner of loving or, at least, what he thinks to be "love". Barrera lays stress on the fact that all "amorous encounters" involving the Patriarca are in reality transformed into a farcical evasion, for the dictator actually engages himself in an instinctive act, without any emotional participation, because he is afraid of revealing his true character. She also presents the interesting argument that the only love he in fact knows reflects his hypocritical life because if true love finds its origins in the acceptance of oneself, the Patriarca could never love, since he could not possibly accept himself<sup>9</sup>.

The dictator's incapacity for love, in the ample acceptance of the word, can be thus exemplified in these vulgar sexual assaults. Since the first time, when he attacked a camp follower whom he had surprised swimming nude in a river (OP, p.164-5), they have always disastrously ended in a humiliating failure. The dictator's sexual frustration is the reason for his growing misery and anguish, for it makes him sink deeper and deeper in his increasingly paranoiac loneliness.

Besides the Patriarca's love for his mother, Bendición Alvarado, whose pursuit discloses his most extraordinary lack of affection; and apart from the already mentioned harem of concubines, who only represent a farce

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9. BARRERA, Marion K., "El Otoño del Patriarca y la idea del eterno retorno", in: Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, Madrid, volume 310, 1976, p.182.

of love, the dictator believes he has loved two women.

The first one is Manuela Sánchez, an enchanting young lady more than a century younger than the Patriarca, who lives in an extremely poor area of the town. The most spectacular fact concerning Manuela is that she mysteriously vanishes in the course of a sun eclipse, after a long and silent courting by the old dictator. She has been given innumerable gifts which meant to convey what he was unable to say, but her unexpected disappearance does not allow the realization of his desire. Desire, in fact, because the Patriarca's divulged "love" is no more than this. It is only a fixed idea, an obsession. He uses his influence to try to win her acceptance but "estos alardes de poder" (OP, p.80) would not soften her "conducta cortés pero invencible de no se acerque demasiado, excelencia, que ahí está mi mamá con las aldabas de mi honra" (OP, Ibid.).

His obsession is reflected in the fact that when he had already "agotado todos los recursos para que [she] lo quisiera por amor" (Ibid.) and her refusal "lo dejaba tan sólo cuando estoy contigo que no me quedan ánimos ni para estar" (Ibid.), he insists on annoying her and meeting her furtively. Nevertheless, his frequent escapes to Manuela's home were already public knowledge. There was, for example, an anonymous melody which everyone - even the irreverent parrots - sang, recording the pain caused by this unrequited love:

"apártense mujeres que ahí viene el general llorando verde con la mano en el pecho, mírenlo cómo va que ya no puede con su poder, que está gobernando dormido, que tiene una herida que no se le cierra" (OP, p.80).

However, this wound to the heart is caused by his own boundless power which, while enabling him to create the afore mentioned eclipse, definitively removes Manuela from him. Yet, this unfortunate event was only the outcome of his obsessive passion which makes everything else, except Manuela Sánchez, simply disappear from his mind. He does not think, just to mention an example, about the inevitable problems he was creating for the poor people whom he forcibly dislodges in order to clean the area surrounding her house.

Concerning the Patriarca's obsession for Manuela Sánchez, Saldivar emphasizes the tragic irony implicit in the dictator's behaviour when, bewitched by the "love" he feels for the one he orders to be crowned as

he also promotes the shooting of three thousand political prisoners in a single night. The critic then adds that

"Ya sumergido por completo en un amor absurdo y en la soledad del poder, no le importa que las vacas se paseen y se caguen en los pasillos y cuartos de un palacio habitado por la soledad, que sólo fracasa por el canto de los canarios, únicos signos de vida, pues ya ni si - quiera el pobre dictador es manifestación viviente"<sup>10</sup>.

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10. SALDIVAR, Dasso, "Acerca de la función política de la soledad en El Otoño del Patriarca", in: La Estafeta Literaria, Madrid, number 561, 1975, p.4.

The second woman the Patriarca believes he has loved is Leticia Nazareno. Again, what he feels for the lady he declares to be "mi único y legítimo amor" (OP, p.133), originates in something which can be termed an unusual obsession: her irresistible smell of a wild animal. Because of the scent left by the nun's body when she walks naked in front of the dictator at the moment she and a group of religious are being banished from the country, the old man can not do anything else except to whisper her name. This is enough for the security service to kidnap her and put her at the Patriarca's disposal (OP, p.163).

In spite of this dismal beginning, where the despot's indisputable strength is clearly shown, we soon realize that this power is transformed into subserviency. Leticia's domination over him increases in the same proportion as she is able to compel him to do things never done before. Though it takes her several months, she finally reaches the "triunfo inconcebible" (OP, p.133) of gradually making him take all his clothes off - including his boots, cartridge belt, machete, etc. - before consummating their first sexual intercourse. Another triumph was to teach him how to read and write in the plenitude of his old age (OP, p.174). Besides, she also forces him to marry her, notwithstanding his vehement protests of "ni de vainas, primero muerto que casado" (OP, p.177). The ultimate and most relevant achievement is to have given him the only son whom

he "había aceptado como suyo" (OP, p.182), after having had more than five thousand children with the uncountable "lovers without love" he had had before (OP, p.50).

The Patriarca's love for Leticia, or what he judges to be love, eventually becomes his total submission to her, causing her least wishes to be immediately fulfilled. Thus, he unconsciously transfers to her the power he formerly held alone. Accordingly, Leticia commands through orders,

"que ella expedía en secreto sin consultarlo con nadie y que el aprobaba en público para que no pareciera ante los ojos de nadie que había perdido los oráculos de sua autoridad" (OP, p.178).

It may be noticed that the people are deeply disgusted by the excesses perpetrated by the ex-nun. The rampageous troops she commands into the market every Wednesday, stealing all she can find with the usual excuse of "que le pasen la cuenta al gobierno" (OP, p.184), become unbearable. The frightened market traders can only whisper "Dios mío, si el general lo supiera" (Ibid.), because he allowed to flourish among the populace the belief he himself stimulated that he was "ajeno a todo cuanto ocurría en el mundo que no estuviera a la altura de su grandeza" (OP, p. 182). Hence, when the first attempt against Leticia's life occurs, with a tremendous dynamite explosion blowing to pieces the car she was supposed to use within an hour (OP,



p.195), the reader's first hypothesis is that the attack surely came from some of those whom she used to loot in the market. This is reinforced by the fact that the Patriarca fears for his wife's life. Thereafter he lives tormented by the possibility of a new attempt against her life (OP, p.198).

Soon, however, there appears the first suspicion about the real instigator of the attack against Leticia when the despot takes the conspicuous decision of "ya no más, carajo, lo que ha de ser que sea pronto" (OP, p.199). His words have the effect of an explosive charge because at that exact moment, he is informed that Leticia and their son have been torn into pieces and eaten by dogs in the public market. For this reason, although there is a tireless hunt for the trainer of the ferocious animals, which were brought from Scotland, there remains some doubts about who really planned and ordered the crime. Yet, the uncertainty completely disappears when one considers the Patriarca's undermined authority. He does not hesitate in sacrificing his "love" in order to be once again the only controller of all his power.

But the dictator's loveless behaviour which is the cause of his despondent loneliness, is not only restricted to relationships with women. It could be said that the latter only represent a part, or better, an example of what the dictator generally feels in relation to the people. As

seen in the afore mentioned cases, the quest for power separated him from his "beloved" ones, aggravating his solitude. Equally, the lack of social solidarity and the use of power only to increase his personal privileges, inevitably deepens still more his solitude. In conclusion, then, it could be said that the novel by García Márquez is a paradigm of those books in which authors explore and analyse the antinomy power-alienation: the more the individual (or a group) eagerly tries to accumulate power the more he (they) feels isolated from the rest of the society and, consequently, shows his (their) incapacity for maintaining culturally - shared relationships with other individuals or social strata. Rama correctly emphasizes that "el ascenso y la permanencia en el poder absoluto era [corresponds to] simultáneamente el proceso de deshumanización". The Uruguayan critic still observes that in Macbeth, Shakespeare examined the continuing degradation of a man who concomitantly loses everything - respect, friends, woman - because of his unrestrainable search for power. This, perhaps, could have been the literary model which inspired García Márquez's novel which also presents "el espectáculo del hombre a quien ciega el poder para poder devorarlo mejor"<sup>11</sup>, showing that loneliness is a kind of social justice for those who let themselves be dominated by their thirst for power.

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11. RAMA, Angel. Los Dictadores Latinoamericanos, op. cit., p.52.

## 1.2 *The solitude of El Supremo*

Roa Bastos' main character also suffers a distressing loneliness, which becomes manifest particularly in his last years of life. Recalling what was observed in the previous chapter about the posthumous perspective of the narrative which covers a lapse of time well beyond El Supremo's lifetime - to which it is possible to add an "almost" posthumous view, that is, a detailed description of the last years of his life - it is also possible to assert that the book comprises an immense and tragic solitude.

El Supremo, who always rejected all family links<sup>12</sup> and who affirmed that he had been conceived without woman, only by the strength of his thought (YES, p.144), understands the necessity of a family when he faces the loneliness of old age and ensuing sickness:

"Solo llevando auestas mi desierta persona. Solo, sin familia, sin hogar, en país extraño. Solo. Nacido viejo, sintiendo que no podía morir más. Condenado a desvivir hasta el último suspiro. Solo. Sin familia. Solo, viejo, enfermo, sin familia, sin siquiera un perro a quien volver los ojos" (YES, p.422).

Yet, the reason for his solitude is not due to the lack of familial ties as it could appear to be, but is

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12. See, for instance, the episode with the "supposed" sister, Petrona Regalada (YES, p.11); or with "El que dicen que es mi padre" (YES, p.162).

primarily socially-based. That is, like García Márquez's Patriarca, El Supremo is incapable of really loving those who surround him. He himself is conscious of this fact when he says: "Nunca he amado a nadie, lo recordaría" (YES, p. 299). He is even in doubt whether he has actually loved Clara Petrona Zavala, the "great love" of his youth. Their marriage is barred by her parents mainly through racial antagonism, since Francia is a half-breed with negro ancestors. But with the above declaration El Supremo acknowledges his incapacity for love which is not congenital, but comes from his quest for absolute power and, as such, it is a social construction.

In general, compelled "to be in isolation by the mechanisms of his position the dictator is a creature condemned to loneliness", Castellanos and Martínez would note<sup>13</sup>. Even if in the case of El Supremo the solitude of the power holder may not be so clearly connected - as in the two other novels examined - to the lack of solidarity with his people's demands and aspirations, the character also feels completely lonely and abandoned. This social vacuum is due to the fact, already referred to in Chapter 1, that his revolution is not completed, since he does not believe in the people whom he wants to protect and continues to consider ignorant. El Supremo's paternalism revealed that he underestimated the people's capacity for choosing and deciding, from various alternatives, the right direction for their society.

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13. CASTELLANOS, J. and MARTINEZ, M., "O ditador latinoamericano, personagem literário", op. cit., p.169.

The dictator's behaviour increasingly isolates him from the rest of his countrymen. He recognizes that he does not have real friends whom he could rely upon, if necessary. On his deathbed he thus realizes the miserable state of loneliness he is in:

"El agua y el fuego, de los que me formé, se complotan ahora para entregarme a la soledad final. Solo, en un país extraño de pura gente idiota. Solo. Sin origen. Sin destino. Encerrado en perpetuo cativeiro. Solo. Sin apoyo. Sin defensa." (YES, p.449).

Several hints at the causes of his solitude could be deduced from this small but meaningful paragraph. The fact that he defines his people as mentally incapable (*gente idiota*) proves what was previously pointed out about his patronizing attitude, which impeded him from regarding his fellow countrymen as equal beings. At the same time, he did not establish any interaction with others, since "he does not have", or in fact does not want to know about his origin, nor about his destiny. Therefore, he feels inevitably alone, without the support of any friend with whom he could share the misfortunes of life. These adversities can be summarized by the presence of death, which means the "final loneliness". Nevertheless, not even in death does El Supremo encounter peace since his mortal remains have an uncertain destination and his cranium, like a macabre greeting, wanders about from hand to hand during a long period.

Hence, the Paraguayan dictator's solitude has a twofold development. On the one hand, it appears as the principal result of his ceaseless struggle to hold absolute power which, though designed to serve his nation, also separates him from the rest of the people as soon as he labels them as stupid. On the other hand, it is displayed by the presence of death. Throughout the narrative the *post-mortem* climate may be perfectly felt, mainly through Francia's critical self-condemnation of several errors he committed during his long life.

The fact that the dictator readily grasps which are the subsistence needs of his people and manages to provide them, but neglects their intellectual necessities, pushes him to an irremediable situation - the solitude of power; the power which increases his superiority in relation to the people, isolating him more and more from his society. In the Paraguayan milieu of that time, his endless erudition and sparkling knowledge about what was happening in the world at that juncture, contrasted with the state of barbarian ignorance in which the rest of the country's population was immersed. Concerning this aspect, Dominguez stresses that in that epoch everything occurred

"en torno a un país rico pero ignaro; pródigo en patriotas que darían su sangre por redimirlo, pero a quienes escapaban todos los hilos de la trama. Aquí estriba un

poco la razón de la soledad de El Supremo, tragedia archiconocida para el intelectual de Hispanoamerica"<sup>14</sup>.

El Supremo experiences a loneliness he himself created, for it somehow stems from his lack of social ties with his people. Although this lack of solidarity can be evaluated differently when compared to the Patriarca and the Primer Magistrado, as I have observed before, it also exists. Otherwise, how could one explain the fact that a sophisticated man of letters, with a wide reading experience and a refined education, opposed himself to intellectual progress and did not encourage the development of higher education in his country? It seems evident to me that his attitude was aimed at inhibiting the formation of contingent opponents, who would certainly emerge as a consequence of a wider cultural expansion. That is, the important thing was to maintain his power, even if it irreversibly condemned to the darkness of ignorance the people for whom he claimed to act and live.

Ironically, it is El Supremo who sees himself condemned to hell. However, for him, hell is not shaped by the usual images of fire, but

"Si hay infierno, es esta nada absoluta de la absoluta soledad. Solo. Solo. Solo en lo negro, en lo blanco, en lo gris, en lo indistinto, en lo creado" (YES, p. 290).

And it is in the context of this hell that El

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14. DOMINGUEZ, Ramiro, "Yo el Supremo, de Augusto Roa Bastos", in: Comentarios sobre 'Yo el Supremo', op. cit., p.39.

Supremo suffers his excruciating loneliness, a punishment, in my view, for his incapacity to develop more humane relations which could soften the frustration and tragedy of solitude.

### *1.3 The Primer Magistrado's loneliness*

Although not embedded in so many complex and axiomatic relations as in the case of the dictators already examined in this chapter, the Primer Magistrado's social isolation also becomes transparent in the course of the novel. From the moment the details about the barbarous massacre of Nueva Córdoba are announced in his beloved France, he is promptly rejected by friends and *protégés*. It is not surprising then, that when going back to the Old Continent, after "restoring the peace" in his country, the tyrant

"sintió como una orgánica necesidad de restablecer sus relaciones con la ciudad. Llamó por teléfono al Quai Conti de los gratos conciertos: la señora no estaba en casa. Llamó al violinista Morel, que lo felicitó por su regreso con el tono presuroso y evasivo de quien desea dar rápido término a una conversación. Llamó a Louisa de Mornand, cuya ama de llaves, luego de hacerle esperar más de lo correcto, le hizo saber que la hermosa dama estaría ausente por varios días. Llamó a Brichot, el profesor de la Sorbona: 'Estoy casi ciego' - le dijo -: 'pero me leen los periódicos'. Y colgó [...] Y llamó, llamó, llamó a éste, a aquél, topándose [...] con voces que parecían haber mudado de registro y estilo" (YES, p.92-3).



The dictator, feeling miserable and still unable to evaluate the reasons for this rejection, is overtaken by a sensation of suffocating and woeful loneliness, which means a state of prolonged unhappy astonishment.

The utmost materialization of his love, that is, France and its culture, artists and beautiful women, now is contemptuously rejecting him, causing him an immense sorrow, something he had never experienced before. His isolation grows as the days go by. When he accidentally meets the Count of Argencourt in a bookshop, for instance, the latter ignores him "con altanero desdén dejándole un saludo en suspenso" (RM, p.110). Such a rejection and many other similar attitudes leave the Primer Magistrado profoundly disconcerted. The dictator, knowing that this terrible affliction of solitude is the worst punishment, fears it more than anything else. Yet, he is not capable of noticing, or does not want to accept that his outrageous acts are the sole reason for the scornful behaviour of those supposed to be his friends. Thus,

"ocultaba el Presidente un resquemante despecho ante las gentes que lo habían humillando y ofendido, cerrándole los caminos de sus moradas" (RM, p.110).

The brutal actions towards his own people, whom he wickedly calls "ignorant Indians and niggers", and orders their killing like the most worthless animals in Nueva

Córdoba, are now punished with the contempt of a society he had idealized as the zenith of civilization. This was not his society and his people, but he loved them. As he explains,

"Poco le hubiera importado ser tratado de 'carnicero', de bárbaro, de cafre, de lo que fuera, en sitios que nunca le habían sido gratos" (RM, p.95).

Nevertheless, to be called so by his dear Parisian friends pushes him towards the distressful abyss of loneliness. Even after this episode, however, the despot continues to pursue the same violent internal measures. As for his old friends, he just considers them ungrateful, without even discerning that they are rejecting him for good humanitarian reasons.

In spite of France's tacit aversion for the Primer Magistrado, it continues to be a paradisiac country for him. When he has to return to his country in the Caribbean, in order to suppress Hoffmann's rebellion, he feels an enormous sadness at having to go back to

"lejos de todo lo que realmente lo hacía feliz. Pensaba en lo de allá y, de antemano, sentía el tedio que significaba el regreso a cualquier punto de partida para quien mucho anduvo en el transcurso de los años" (RM, p.127).

These lines clearly indicate his indifference and lovelessness in relation to the people of his country -

which he calls *allā* -, to which he returns exclusively to defend his own political domination. The thirst for power enlarges his segregation, because the attitudes he is forced to take to preserve his absolutist control - persistent repression and blood shedding - mean, on the one hand, his increasing distance from his French circle and, on the other, the irreconcilable gap between the dictator and his fellow citizens who no longer accept his arbitrary practices.

### 1.3.1 In Plato's cave

In the context of a depressing solitude, Carpentier draws an analogy between the men who live in the cave described by Plato and the Primer Magistrado. At a certain point, the dictator explains to the Student<sup>15</sup> that

"No se acaban de recibir lecciones en esta vida. Hoy, oyéndote hablar, me di cuenta, de repente, de que soy el Primer Preso de la Nación. Sí. No te sonrías. Vivo aquí rodeado de ministros, funcionarios, generales y doctores, todos doblados en zalamerías y curbetas, que no hacen sino ocultarme la verdad. Sólo me muestran un mundo de apariencias. Vivo en la caverna de Platón [...] Tú conoces eso, de la caverna de Platón? Desde luego! Tonto habértelo preguntado!" (RM, p.240-1).

I believe it is worthwhile to review here the parable of the prisoners in Plato's cave, so that it can be

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15. For more details about their conversation, see Chapter 3.

properly related to the words pronounced by Carpentier's character.

In the underground environment, we are told, men live from their childhood with no contact with human beings outside the cave. In addition to that, they can not even turn over because heavy fetters prevent them moving their heads. Along the cave's whole width there is an opening allowing a flash of light to come down, but this way out is very high and difficult to climb. Behind the prisoners, at a higher level, there is a fire which also provides light. Yet, between the fire and the prisoners there is a path across the cave and along it there exists a low wall. Behind this wall persons pass carrying statues of men, reproductions of animals in stone and wood and all sorts of things. Because of the wall, the prisoners below are able to see only the shadows which the fire casts upon the wall of the cave ahead of them. The persons who carry the effigies and whose voices the prisoners can hear, are not seen. Thus, they mistakenly consider the artifacts as real beings<sup>16</sup>.

Plato's idea in reviving the unforgettable image of the cave mentioned by Socrates was to establish the keen difference between the concepts of appearance and reality of things and in consequence to determine the real foundations of truth. To climb up to the entrance of the cave

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16. See PLATO. The Republic. London, Pan Books, 1981, p.192-220.

and reach freedom would be very painful for the prisoner attempting it. At first, he would not be able to see anything as the light would hurt his eyes accustomed to permanent darkness. Nevertheless, he would soon adapt to seeing the reality of things (truth) and not only appearances.

Yet, in the case of the Primer Magistrado, the analogy mainly relates to his increasing solitude. He, eventually, finds himself surrounded by people he does not trust because they are constantly hiding the truth from him. Consequently, the dictator feels gradually lonelier, and compares his seclusion to that endured by the prisoners in the cave. As he laments, he is "the first prisoner of the nation". His words obviously aim at obtaining the Student's sympathy and, perhaps, do not express his real feelings. But it is interesting, anyway, to observe that the image of the prisoner in the cave is effective for the dictator. He is isolated because of his autocratic power, as it was pointed out before, and this is the reason why he lives, as he asserts, "in a world of appearances". But he is not able to reach the entrance of the cave which would rescue him from this depressing situation and would enable him to have real (true) relations with his people.

### 1.3.2 Silence and death

The Primer Magistrado's social exclusion is

exposed more explicitly through the deep silence which announces the beginning of the general strike. It is an unusual silence which disturbingly deafens the despot used to the lively and buoyant murmur of the city:

"La capital empezaba su día - aquel día - en silencio, un silencio que no era solamente el de la funeraria, silencio de otras épocas, silencio de albas remotas, silencio de cuando pastaban las cabras en las calles principales de la ciudad; silencio roto, tan sólo, por rebuzno lejano, la tos de una tosferina, el llanto de un niño" (RM, p.254).

The overwhelming silent protest makes the Primer Magistrado remember and miss the past, a time when he had not been corrupted yet by the enormous appeals for pleasure which a power bearer in an authoritarian regime usually succumbs to. Not only he but also the police troops in charge of the repression of social unrest, "estaban aterrorizados ante el silencio, la soledad en que se hallaban" (RM, p.259). The growing panic generated among the policemen who, shooting erratically at the closed houses, also face the unexpected silence, is equivalent to the feeling of isolation enveloping the Primer Magistrado. The resulting political instability foretells the erosion of his power. His fall as the highest authority in the nation becomes imminent from that crucial moment onwards.

As a consequence, the one who had once been almighty in the nation is now even more vexed by the manner

in which he has to leave the government, being obliged to wait for the motor boat,

"destinada a sacarme de aquí como mercancía de contrabando, como ataúd de muerto en hospital de ricos, de donde había sido el amo de los hombres, destinos y haciendas" (RM, p.290).

His power evanescences completely and his only alternative is to wait for death, which is the extreme form of solitude. The novel shows, therefore, that the despot is obsessed with the idea of death in his exile. And when he dies, he is buried near Don Porfirio's<sup>17</sup> tomb who, according to him,

"en vez de descansar en un inmenso panteón nacional, estaba enterrado ahora, cansado de ingratitudes, en un triste rincón del cementerio Montparnasse" (RM, p.162).

Concluding this section, we could say that García Márquez's, Roa Bastos' and Carpentier's dictators suffer the final solitude as a form of punishment for their lack of solidarity and for all social malpractices carried out under the auspices of their government. The authors thus subtly condemn the rulers' thirst for absolute power, placing them in a situation they have created themselves. As a result, the dictators pay for their errors through an

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17. He is referring to Porfirio Díaz, Mexican dictator from 1876 to 1880 and from 1884 to 1911.

irremediable and self-destructive state of solitude.

## 2. The Role of the Double

A common characteristic of the dictators studied in this thesis is that they have doubles who manifestly serve to intensify their power. Although only in the case of El Otoño del Patriarca is the double embodied by someone who is physically similar to the despot, I think that the metaphysical double which appears in Yo el Supremo, is the one which is the strongest [compared with the others]. But apart from this one, El Supremo has another double, namely his scribe Patiño. As for the Primer Magistrado, the role of his double is performed by his secretary Peralta. Finally, the Patriarca increases his power through a succession of characters which, besides the double Aragonés, encompasses Saturno Santos, Rodrigo Aguilar and Saenz de la Barra. All of them are obviously mere appendages of the power of their masters who, through the action of these manifold shadows, can more easily and for a longer time maintain the position they hold.

### *2.1 The Patriarca and his doubles*

In Kagemusha (1981), a celebrated film by the well-known Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, it is shown how by



resorting to a double - a trivial artifice among the Japanese feudal lords in the Sixteenth century - it was possible for the Takeda clan to preserve for a longer period their hegemony among the innumerable feudal families that existed then. Mortally wounded, the invincible warrior (*musha*), Shingen Takeda, finds, with the help of his brother, a double, or a shadow (*kage*) for his place, a false role approved by the clan "directory". This fact is kept an absolute secret for three years during which the double, a convicted thief, occupies the place of the now dead leader. After this period, and victimized by a series of unhappy incidents, Kagemusha is expelled by the clan and dies anonymously near the palace whose owners he had helped to preserve in power. Thereafter, not being able to count on the mythical strength and strategic skills of its leader, the clan is assailed by enemy groups, and is eventually exterminated in the battle of Shidaragara.

In constructing the tragedy of a double, it is my opinion that Kurosawa actually reverses the focus: instead of a representation of power, his film deals with the power of representation. And it is precisely at this point that one can discover an identification between the doubles created by the Japanese director and by the Colombian writer. However, whereas for the former, through the double's representation, power is artificially preserved only for a determined lapse of time, this does not avert the Takeda's

irreversible *débâcle*; for the Patriarca the role of his substitute serves to maintain his power unaltered. In the same way that the dictator has his reflection in Aragonés, Shingen Takeda finds his faithful replica in Kagemusha. But the latter knows that he will not play his part much longer when he affirms, at a moment in the cinematographic plot, that "a double means something only when there is an original". Kagemusha perceives the precariousness of his situation since he is forced to simulate someone who no longer exists. Patricio Aragonés, in his turn, pretends to be the Patriarca only at dangerous moments, so that the tyrant may retain his unfailing power. Yet, the Patriarca's double is also aware that, while "the original" exists, he is nothing but a simulacrum of the power mechanisms he helps to maintain.

Aragonés' personification of the Patriarca transforms him from a voluntary into a kind of recognized impostor of the dictator. That is, the tyrant readily understands that he can take advantage of a man identical to himself in order to strengthen his power base. The fact that the dictator "siempre parecía que se desdoblaba" (OP, p.13), being seen simultaneously in several places, results from the parallel acting of the two men. This false appearance of ubiquity augments the fame and power of the despot. Aragonés renounces his own identity, facing the risks ascribed to any unpopular power holder and surviving several

murder attempts aimed at the real tyrant. When at last he is mortally wounded, after a poisoned dart is thrown at him, he grumbles, while on his deathbed, some truths to the dictator who forced him to represent him publicly,

"no porque la patria lo necesite vivo como usted dice sino porque al más bragado se le hiela el culo coronando a una puta de la belleza sin saber por dónde le va a tronar la muerte" (OP, p.28).

Hence, the double, who had become the "hombre esencial del poder" (OP, p.17), dies in the place of his master. This first death of the Patriarca, through a surrogate, creates a farcical situation which even helps him to defeat a rebellion against "el despotismo de siglos" (OP, p.26) and shows how his power is ultimately strengthened through the double. Besides guaranteeing his physical and political survival, the double's death and the real dictator's subsequent "resurrection" widely spreads his reputation for immortality.

Aragonés' disappearance inculcates a solitary dimension to his government, which is maintained throughout his old age. Yet, at the end of his days, he can not even remember the name of the double, with whom he once shared his domination and his many women. When Leticia Nazareno urges him to read the news in old papers,

"él se encontraba a sí mismo en fotografías tan antiguas que muchas de ellas no eran suyas sino de un antiguo doble que había muerto por él y cuyo nombre no recordaba" (OP, p.189).

Besides the double Aragonés, the Patriarca duplicates his domineering connections through several acolytes who assure his permanence in the command of the nation. He is very fond of all of them though, oddly enough, the only one who is not cruelly murdered is the Indian bodyguard Saturno Santos, to whom he rewards with a retirement pension when old age prevents him from defending the tyrant. The other men who reproduce the dictator's power structure are Rodrigo Aguilar, the "compadre de toda la vida" (OP, p.34-5) and Ignacio Saenz de la Barra, to whom the dictator yields because of "el encanto irresistible y el ansia tentacular de aquel bárbaro vestido de príncipe" (OP, p.210). Through their defence of the despot's illegitimate authority, and by multiplying brutal and arbitrary incursions against the people, the two assistants gradually amass a personal power over the Patriarca which becomes manifest in the dictator's complaints throughout the development of the novel. Consequently, both are violently - yet in a bizarre manner - eliminated. Rodrigo Aguilar is served baked like well-seasoned pork, in the notorious episode of the banquet the general offers to the government officials wishing them "buen provecho señores" (OP, p.127). The elegant Saenz de la Barra, in his turn,

does not escape a death-trap as well, for he is grotesquely "macerado a golpes, colgado de los tobillos en un farol de la Plaza de Armas y con sus propios órganos genitales metidos en la boca" (OP, p.239). Their elimination is decided when the Patriarca suspects that they no longer add strength to his power but, on the contrary, the two former allies are just building their independent and power-based careers.

## *2.2 The double question and the quest for a double in Roa Bastos' novel*

After the discussion in El Otoño del Patriarca, I will assess the much more complex definition of the double in Yo el Supremo. The most notable characteristic of this novel's protagonist is that he is shaped by two dimensions - the *yo* and the *él*<sup>18</sup> which dichotomize his role in the course of the novel. From my viewpoint, the primary objective of this separation is to show that things, as they appear in their immediate configuration, do not necessarily correspond to their inner reality. So, throughout the whole narrative a growing discrepancy between these two aspects embodied in the character can be clearly noticed, that is, the hiatus between his individual "I" and the public figure

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18. It is important to pay attention to the fact that in Spanish the word él is the definite article "the" but also the pronoun "he".

of the dictator incarnated by the "he".

Different parts of the book are, therefore, devoted to the *yo* and to the *él*. The objective is to mark clearly the conflict between the two levels: to the first one belongs the *cuaderno privado*, a sort of personal report concerning all that afflicts the character as an individual self, such as the consequences of the incapacity for love I have already analysed. The second dimension, the *él*, which can be associated with the public role performed by the highest authority, is established in the making of the *circular perpétua*, where El Supremo dictates to Patiño, the other double of the dictator<sup>19</sup>, the history of Paraguay. In this way, the historic figure is reviewed in his public and private dimension. Several accepted interpretations of the official history are thus rejected, as the dictator presents his own version of past events.

It is important to mention here the dialogue carried out between Patiño and El Supremo which reveals that the scribe is aware of this double character of the dictator:

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19. There are moments of complete identification between El Supremo and Patiño in the novel, which could prove the use of the double to intensify the dictator's power. See, for example, the episode when El Supremo takes Patiño by surprise: "Acabas de escribir soñoliento YO EL SUPREMO". Caught in the very act, the scribe answers: "¡Señor[...] usted maneja mi mano!" (YES, p.67).

"Cuando su Merced dicta circularmente, orden del Perpetuo Dictador, yo escribo sus palabras en la Circular Perpetua. Cuando su Merced piensa en voz alta, voz de Hombre Supremo, anoto sus palabras en la Libreta de Apuntes. En qué estableces la oposición Supremo Dictador/Hombre Supremo? En qué notas la diferencia? En el tono, Señor. El tono de su palabra dicta hacia abajo o hacia arriba" (YES, p.319).

Although there exists a superposition of the *yo* and the *él* levels in several parts of the account<sup>20</sup>, I believe that it is precisely on the personal level that the protagonist's double character appears most clearly, since it is always mentioned by the "I". As the *yo* says, at the very beginning of the narrative,

"Yo debo cuidarme de ser engañado por el delirio de las semejanzas. Todos se calman pensando que son un solo individuo. Difícil ser constantemente el mismo hombre. Lo mismo no es siempre lo mismo. Yo no soy siempre YO. El único que no cambia es EL" (YES, p.52).

The *él*, on the other hand, does not change because - being the historical double of the private character who leads the narrative in the first person singular - he already has his definitive place in History. In my opinion, the fact that history has been frequently warped throughout time does not substantially modify the argument<sup>21</sup>.

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20. See illustrations of this fusion in *Yo el Supremo*: "El país entero respira por los pulmones del YO/EL" (p.124); "YO/EL tenemos nuestro buen tiempo, nuestro mal tiempo adentro" (p.129); "La marca al rojo de YO/EL" (p.278).

21. See further analysis of this falsification of the historical account in the last chapter of this study.

El Supremo has already acquired a solid historical background and his accomplishments are notorious, being transmitted from one generation to the subsequent one. This is the reason why the general configuration of the *é*l is permanent whereas the *yo* is much more multifaceted.

The *yo*, therefore, experiences earthly sufferings and sensations, in particular the degeneration of the body due to illness and/or old age. Whereas the *é*l remains undamaged in his indefinite age. An example of this appears in the final episode of the fire. It destroys not only part of the dictator's manuscripts but also, apparently, his body. Meanwhile, the *é*l may leave the *yo* who is an easy prey in the flames:

"En un hombre dos rostros. Uno vivo, otro muerto. El se desinteresa. Se desentiende. Abre la puerta. Se dirige al zaguán. Sale al exterior" (YES, p.450).

The ultimate meaning of this incident is that the historical being remains alive while only man as an individual being dies.

At this point we can perceive the true importance the double represents for the *yo*. It, the other pole constituted by his *é*l, serves to intensify his power through a historical image which extends until the present day. That is, the double character of El Supremo is in fact responsible for his absolute power, since one level separated



from the other would never hold the same magnitude of power. Only together do they consolidate their force and influence: "Yo es Él, definitivamente. YO-ÉL-SUPREMO. Inmemorial. Imperecedero" (YES, p.450).

The *Él* survives the passing of time and remains untouched throughout history by means of written and oral transmission. But this only occurs because, at a certain time, there existed the dichotomy *Yo-Él*.

Still, when one aims at examining the intriguing problem of the double character of El Supremo, it is appropriate to remember what the Nivaklé sorcerer says to him:

"Todos los seres tienen dobles. Las ropas, los utensilios, las armas. Las plantas, los animales, los hombres. Este doble se apresenta a los ojos de los hombres como sombra, reflejo o imagen[...] Todos los seres tienen dobles. Pero el doble del humano es uno y triple al mismo tiempo. A veces más. Cada una de estas almas es distinta a las demás, pero a pesar de sus diferencias forman una sola" (YES, p.183-4).

The multiplicity of levels on which the main character may be perceived is a remarkable literary device elaborated by Roa Bastos. Though there is a continuous "struggle" among the different levels, the *yo* and the *él* always stand out among the others. The narrator properly asserts,

"Acorde estoy en que esta lucha ad astra per aspera ha hecho de mí un mestizo de dos almas. Una, mi alma-fría, mira ya desde la otra orilla donde el tiempo se arremansa y empieza a acangrejarse. La otra, el alma-caliente, vigila aún en mí" (YES, p.449).

That is, one of the "portions" that make up the protagonist lies as if dead and already observes everything from the contradictory side of life, i.e., death. It is the "I" which depends on the body to move and act normally. The other one - the "hot-soul" - represents the historical figure which will never perish.

To end this part I shall mention that already at the beginning of the narrative there is an attempt to explicate the phenomenon of separation between the *yo* and *él* that occurs in the course of the novel. The attempt is related to the episode in which El Supremo is swept off his horse by a heavy rainstorm and, after falling, he anticipates the existence of a double within himself:

"Perdido en dos por la concusión de la caída. Me encontré en el caso de quien ya no puede decir Yo porque no está solo, sintiéndose más solo que nunca en esas dos mitades, sin saber a cuál de ellas pertenece[...] Un hueso roto, la columna quebrada, un golpe de la base del cráneo pueden provocarte esta alucinación. Tal vez no lo supe en ese momento" (YES, p.62).

Castellanos and Martínez<sup>22</sup> mention the problem of diplopia, probably caused by the fall of the dictator, as

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22. CASTELLANOS, Jorge and MARTÍNEZ, Miguel, op. cit., p.162.

the primary reason for the unfolding of his character. The disease, that is, a disorder of the sight in which a single object appears double, could certainly be the original explanation of why El Supremo, from then on, sees himself duplicated.

I imagine, however, that the insistence on the theme of the double in Yo el Supremo represents, above all, the author's decision to present dialectically the various possible versions of the public and private life which pervade his - or, in reality, any - social being. By confronting these variations, the reader will be able to draw his own image of the dictator which will probably produce something closer to the truth.

### *2.3 The double in El Recurso del Método*

In the same way as his fellows studied in the preceding sections, the Primer Magistrado also has his double, represented by his secretary Peralta. The latter is not only used to strengthen the dictator's power foundations but cherishes the same ideals as well. Although Peralta is the only one, among the doubles analysed in this study, who betrays his partner, he is, in spite of that, the sole one who seems to be completely identified with the tyrant's worldview. From the start of the novel onwards, we notice that both share the same thoughts, even up to the point in which the secretary is able to continue an interrupted

sentence or idea initiated by the Primer Magistrado<sup>23</sup>.

While Patricio Aragonés or even Patiño submit themselves to the dictators' influence, serving them with - out any consequent questioning - even if not best pleased -, Peralta seems truly to enjoy his role as the dictator's right-hand man. He finds great pleasure, for instance, in accompanying the boss in nightly rounds in Paris, drinking and meeting women.

Peralta knows all the particular gestures of the despot, his behaviour and reactions, and also his most intimate secrets as, for example, details about his taste for drinking. If in Paris they can take advantage of the , quasi-anonymity to drink heavily, the same does not happen in their country where the tyrant's pharisaical posture forces him to support vehement campaigns against alcohol consumption. To remedy this situation while in their country, Peralta panders to the Primer Magistrado's vice, carrying everywhere his small suitcase filled with bottles of rum. Incidentally, this suitcase later proves to be the only possible way in which bombs are carried into the palace, for it is the only object not inspected by the guards at the entrance (RM, p.279).

I consider the passage about the campaign against Ataúlfo Galván (RM, p.58) to be the most exemplary proof of the total conformity of ideals between the Primer Magistrado and his double. In order to preserve a false

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23. For an example of this, see the episode when both demonstrate the same assumed erudition on RM, p.58 and 59.

image of austerity, the dictator can not drink publicly in his country. As a result, he constantly suffers a pressing impulse to drink which makes him feel full of anxiety and as if his body were empty. Peralta cunningly understands what the master experiences and, without any verbal agreement, acts readily. Assuming himself the irresistible desire for drinking, he produces, from his suitcase, a bit of rum which he offers to the men whom he is talking to. The Primer Magistrado accepts it with hypocritical reluctance: "Por una vez" (RM, Ibid.), he emphasizes after his secretary's insistent appeals, stressing that the drink would even help him to keep healthy because of the low temperature. Thus, it can be observed that Peralta acts as a permanent shadow of the dictator, satisfying his yearnings with the same efficiency of one who also shares his power.

When there occurs a rebellion *allā*, Peralta tries to persuade the dictator to remain in Paris, enjoying all those fine pleasures they are used to (RM, p.131). They share, for example, the same taste for wines, for the delicacies they are offered at the table of the Bois Charbon of Monsieur Musard (RM, p.32), and for the operas they attend with the same critical sense of *connoisseurs* (RM, p.38). Hence, Peralta stands as the most convincing of the doubles examined. The reader, however, undoubtedly catches his most obvious meaning, i.e., a typical opportunist who

flatters and serves the dictator in order to enjoy the unlimited delights a person close to a powerful head of state is entitled to.

Taking this into consideration it is puzzling to understand the double's final treachery. Convincing in the role he performs up to this moment, Peralta's ultimate perfidy causes an enormous astonishment. When hidden in the North American consulate as a refugee, the Primer Magistrado notices that Peralta has disappeared. He is then informed by the consul that his secretary had been fetched by Leoncio Martínez's collaborators. The reaction of the reader would perhaps be the same as the dictator's: "Lo van a matar!" (RM, p.278). Yet, soon afterwards, he becomes deeply shocked when he listens to the agent's report about how Peralta seemed to be happy and how the revolutionaries had welcome him with laughter and jokes. "Le estaba jugando sucio y nada más" (RM, p.278), stresses the consul to the amazed Primer Magistrado.

It can be observed that, from the very instant the double abandons his master and his falsehood becomes known, the power of the tyrant diminishes even more. He feels "agobiado por una tristeza enorme, de padre escupido, de cornudo apaleado, de Rey Lear arrojado por sus hijas" (RM, p.279). His double's treason prefigures, hence, the complete withdrawal of all power he still held.

### 3. The Immanent Violence of Power

"Power is licit if it is used to serve. If instead of serving power is used to oppress, emerges violence"<sup>24</sup>.

"Toda sociedad dividida en clases antagónicas y por tanto fundada en la propiedad privada y en la explotación del hombre por el hombre, se caracteriza por la violencia que ejerce el poder político sobre la población desposeída"<sup>25</sup>. Starting from this definition by Bartra, it is my intention now to examine the conduct adopted by the dictators discussed in this work, pinpointing those aspects where the violence of power becomes salient in the novels concerned. The rulers utilize extremely brutal means when the preservation of their power is at stake. These acts of violence vary in tone and degree - from a frightening verbal menace to cruel scenes of massacred crowds.

From the literary viewpoint, the shocking images of violence are mitigated by prolonged sequences of semi-psychological incursions into the dictators inner feelings, whose day-dreams reveal their otherwise improbable human side, which could even shun any responsibility they

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24. Sentence said by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel in an interview. In: Folha de São Paulo, São Paulo, 11th June, 1983.

25. BARTRA, Roger. Breve Dicionário de Sociologia Marxista, op. cit., p. 140.

bear for the violence perpetrated in their name. If the authors' purpose was to make the reader feel pity and even an unconfessed sympathy towards the dictators in certain passages, and thus demonstrate that violence in general is not necessarily linked to the existence of inhumane masters but, on the contrary, is a common daily occurrence, they effectively made their point. The three writers here scrutinized share a non-manichean view about human relations and their social configuration by showing the dictators also as human beings. And, as a consequence, this fact paradoxically strengthens the scenes of violence because it renders them more lifelike.

Violence as a social practice is a perennial and crucially important ingredient in the books under investigation. Its appearance varies enormously, comprising all sorts of fraudulent gains and arbitrarinesses on the part of those who used it exclusively to preserve their class position and/or personal benefits. In this sense, it is not circumscribed to the unique violence committed by the individual dictator against the people but it encompasses the violence of any class society. In other words, the despot only symbolizes an unjust political system where the existing social contradictions are the raw material and the condition for a persisting violence.



### 3.1 The violence in El Recurso del Método

Both sides of this continuous violence are registered in Carpentier's novel, that is, on the one hand there are the cruel attitudes assumed by the Primer Magis - trado, with the sole objective of preserving his personal power and, on the other, the reaction of the popular sectors against these barbarous acts.

It is in the passage about the massacre of Nueva Córdoba, narrated in the second chapter of the novel, that the peak of this state of violence unleashed by the power holder seems to have been reached. In this part, there is the unbelievable account of how peasants hiding in the National Sanctuary of the Divine Shepherdess were massacred and the surviving ones taken to the Municipal Slaughter House, where they were hanged from hooks and beams for meat. With some still in their death throes, the terrifying picture serves as scenario for the photographs which Monsieur Garcin takes of the smiling soldiers who performed such barbarities unabashed, as if they were fishermen or hunters who are proud of being portrayed beside their prey (RM, p.81-2).

This bloody extermination is later detailed by the Primer Magistrado's friend, Reinaldo Hahn when, in Paris, he tells the former about what had been published in the French daily paper *Le Matin* about the painful occurrence:

"Todas las fotografías de Monsieur Garcín habían salido a tres, cuatro columnas, mostrando los cadáveres mutilados, los cadáveres arrastrados, los cadáveres colgados de los garfios del Matadero Municipal, por las axilas, por las barbas, por los costillares, hincados de picas, tridentes, hierros y facas. Y las mujeres combatientes, obligadas a correr desnudas, a bayonetazos en lomo, por las calles de la ciudad. Y las otras violadas en amparo de templo. Y las otras, tumbadas en corrales. Y los mineros ametrallados en masa, frente al muro del cementerio, con música de bandas militares y alegrías de cornetas" (RM, p.94).

The outcome of the report is the impromptu condemnation of those he considered to be his friends, as already stressed. Nevertheless, this cold reaction surrounded by silence, does not diminish the dictator's ignominious cruelty against all threats to his power, whatever their real dimension is. The climax of violence continues until the episode of the telephones, which describes another bloodbath, the single aim of which is to maintain a power structure already corroded by excessive violence. This desperate attempt, however, only generates a growing surge of protests from the oppressed classes, for the people cannot bear the tyrant's arbitrariness any longer and react by force to defeat him. Accordingly, there is also the violence against the prevailing system, though it sometimes occurs only by chance, as in the episode in which the leader of the rebels decides to destroy himself with a dynamite charge soon after he is unequivocally defeated. The explosion also kills involuntarily some of those who defend the Primer Magistrado's power:

"Miguel Estatua acababa de volarse a la dinamita, con todas sus criaturas de piedra. Algunos pedazos de Evangelistas volaron por sobre la tropa, matando tres soldados a tajo de nimbos afilados como hachas por los cinceles del barrenero inspirado" (RM, p.82-3).

At other moments, the uprising is characterized by many bombs exploding in the most varied public places and, though generally innocuous, these attacks demonstrate the people's disposition to resist. The same character of civil resistance is shown in the image of the rotten horse which is said to pollute the city's water reservoir but is nothing more than a wooden artifact put there by someone who opted for an anarchic road. Yet, even if this mobilization by the people can not be labelled exactly as violent act, it is effective in finally defeating the dictator<sup>26</sup>.

### 3.2 *The violent dimension in El Otoño del Patriarca*

In the case of García Márquez's celebrated book the theme of violence seems less lifelike than in El Recurso del Método. Though it is notorious that the author has shaped his narrative based on true facts, as he has

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26. Nevertheless, in order to destroy the reaction of the population the Primer Magistrado still carries on many arbitrary policies before his *débâcle*. An example of these is the shooting of all students who protest against the imprisonment of their teacher (RM, p.181). Another instance, where we can notice the sadism of the ruler, is to order that his opponents be put alive inside rectangular boxes filled with cement, which formed an enormous quantity of blocks that seemed to be destined for enlarging the prison (RM, p.208-9).

reiterated, I believe that the frequent recourse to hyperboles, which abound in the book, eventually deadens all the cruel descriptions presented. That is, its impact is not so impressive because the reader gradually gets used to this sort of rhetorical exaggeration which characterizes García Márquez's style. Even so, I do believe that El Otoño del Patriarca is a novel that deals with the theme of violence passionately and courageously as well as coherently. Maldonado-Denis points out that

"García Márquez enfoca en esta obra, con gran acierto, un sistema social predicado sobre, y asentado en, la violencia, la más retrógrada y bárbara de las violencias: la violencia que se practica contra los pueblos"<sup>27</sup>.

The author describes, through literary images, the socio-political mechanisms that establish economic processes within a social system which perpetuates the misery of the majority of the people so that only a few are able to dominate them. Yet, and this is the important point, he manages to do it with a creative sense of humour which never gives way to mere leftist propaganda.

The already mentioned banquet, described in El Otoño del Patriarca, in which Rodrigo Aguilar is served baked to the astonished ministers, seems to be, for example,

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27. See MALDONADO-DENIS, Manuel, "La violencia del subdesarrollo y el subdesarrollo de la violencia: un análisis de El Otoño del Patriarca", in: Casa de las Americas, Havana, number 98, year XVI, September/October, 1976, p.25.

a literary extravagance where the implicit cruelty of the act is ultimately diluted by the jocoseness. Nevertheless, if we evaluate the event *vis-à-vis* some situations sometimes present in real life, we notice that it is an analogy that could be perfectly inserted into the context of the violent world we live in. And here it could be compared to the novel that was the predecessor of this theme of violence within a dictatorial context, El Señor Presidente by Miguel Ángel Asturias. At the beginning of the narrative, the Guatemalan author describes the beggars who had been imprisoned, and who fear that someone will

"degollarlos para darles de comer a la policía. Las caras de los antropófagos iluminadas como faroles[...] los bigotes como babas de chocolate"<sup>28</sup>.

The powerful, perhaps, are not antropophagites who enjoy the practice of eating human meat. Yet, this scene of the novel especially denounces, by recourse to a persuasive symbol, their disregard for human life. If they do not really eat them, they do destroy them through torture or other kinds of violence. Similar arguments could be raised about the banquet scene depicted in García Márquez's novel. The strict difference between the two episodes lies just in the tone: while Asturias' description is tragic but real, the Colombian writer's is enriched with emblematical

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28. ASTURIAS, Miguel Ángel. El Señor Presidente in his Obras Completas, Madrid, Aguilar, 1968, p.182.

and humorous devices, which makes it surrealist, resembling those remarkable paintings by Salvador Dalí. This is then the characteristic quality of the violence documented in El Otoño del Patriarca - as it seems to be grossly excessive, we tend to discard it as something essentially unreal. If, however, we take into consideration the symbolism contained in some passages we can assert that the novel denounces, through laughter, a deplorable social reality.

Another tragic, yet also humorous instance of this persisting violence is the passage describing the substitution of the usual methods used to kill those condemned to the death penalty. In consequence, the barbarous and medieval execution where the victim was quartered by horses is replaced by the electric chair, a "civilized" manner of killing. But in spite of the "civilization", violence does not diminish<sup>29</sup>. We notice

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29. This passage reminds me of another with the same context, in El Siglo de las Luces by Carpentier, where we also see that "barbarism" is substituted by "civilization" in a tragic way. The fact occurs when Esteban goes to a hospital in Paramaribo because of a small inflammation in his arm and finds nine negroes peacefully smoking in the waiting room:

"Y supo el joven con horror que esos esclavos, convictos de un intento de fuga y cimarronada, habían sido condenados por la corte de Justicia de Surinam a la amputación de la pierna izquierda. Y como la sentencia había de ejecutarse limpiamente, de modo científico, sin usar se de procedimientos arcaicos, propios de épocas bárbaras, que provocaban excesivos sufrimientos o ponían en peligro la vida del culpable, los nueve esclavos eran traídos al mejor cirujano de Paramaribo para que procediera, sierra en mano, a lo dispuesto por el Tribunal".

(CARPENTIER, Alejo. El Siglo de las Luces. Barcelona, Barral Editores, 1973, p.242-3).

that violence even increases significantly with the use of this "modern" method of killing. The most exhausted political prisoners are chosen for the "rehearsals":

"en el manejo del trono de la muerte cuyas descargas absorbían el total de la potencia eléctrica de la ciudad, conocíamos la hora exacta del experimento mortal porque nos quedábamos un instante en las tinieblas[...] la mayoría de las victimas se quedaban colgadas de las correas de la silla con el cuerpo amorcillado y echando humos de carne asada pero todavía resollando de dolor hasta que alguien tuviera la piedad de acabar de matarlos a tiros después de varias tentativas frustradas" (OP, p.191-2).

Even if the electricity were enough for the executions, the barbarism of the act would obviously persist. Nevertheless, the way García Márquez found to describe these deaths seems too barbarous to appear as truth. The widespread climate of violence practiced in the pages of El Otoño del Patriarca appears, thus, as something simply inconceivable and, therefore, unlikely to happen in real life - political prisoners are thrown alive to feed hungry crocodiles (OP, p.29); others are scalped and their skin sent to their families (OP, Ibid.); two thousand children are blown up with dynamite in the sea because they known the fraudulent secret of the national lottery (OP, p.116), and others, boys under the age of five, have electric shocks applied to their genital organs in order to force their terrorized parents to confess supposed political crimes (OP, p.231). As these examples unequivocally show,

there are innumerable scenes of violence - so great that they appear to be only novelistic resources - which, though deplorable, emerge from the very Latin American reality.

### 3.3 Yo el Supremo: is there any justification for violence?

In Roa Bastos' novel, as one might expect, violence is not presented as a gratuitous and meaningless artifice, but as a fact originating in a historically determined social domain. This statement is certainly not intended to justify the hangings at the foot of the orange tree, the whipping and tortures endured by prisoners during Francia's government, or the confessions forcefully obtained through these deplorable methods as was, for instance, the case of Yegros:

"Mi ilustre primo Yegros, muy pálido al frente de los escuadrones de caballería. Ya está amarrado al tronco del naranjo. Ha confesado su traición. Le ha costado hacerlo, y únicamente lo ha hecho cuando la dosis de azotes ha llegado a la cuenta de ciento veinticinco [...] No he tenido más remedio que mandarlo fusilar hace veinte años" (YES, p.270)

Yegros was only one of the sixty-eight convicts executed beside the orange tree on the 17th of July, 1821<sup>30</sup> (YES, p.224), the so-called "Day of Terror". These convicts

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30. Considering that Yegros execution was in 1821 and it is mentioned that it was "twenty years ago", it proves once more the post-humous perspective of the book, since it was one year after Francia's death, in 1840.



belonged to the Paraguayan élite and were conspiring against the government of El Supremo. Francia endeavoured to abolish the privileges of the upper class and to distribute more equitably the nation's wealth, a policy which was obviously rejected by those whose share was being threatened. As a consequence, a plot tacitly supported by Buenos Aires was organized against him. Unfortunately for the group, the coup they were planning was discovered in time. In order to assure the well-being of the vast majority of the population, El Supremo asserts that he had no option left but to resort to extreme measures.

It is not my intention to minimize the death penalty or any harassment committed on the grounds of political antagonisms, something that, in my point of view, can not be based upon any reasonable justification. Yet, besides the motives which made El Supremo order the action, i.e., the defence of the people's rights, it is necessary to understand this violence within the spatial and temporal context. That historical period, i.e., the first quarter of the Nineteenth century, was marked by persistent turmoil in the neighbouring countries and social unrest in Paraguay as well. Nevertheless, even if the dictator's objective in ordering the killings is to preserve the recently erected pillars of a democratic society, particularly in the economic field, he has been heavily criticized for this attitude, during and after his time of government.

Even nowadays historians affirm that with the heads of those illustrious personalities were also lost *la civilización y la ciudadanía* in Paraguay<sup>31</sup>. Trying to redeem the dictator's action from a supposedly mere attempt at strengthening his personal power, Roa Bastos presents parallel facts which, if they certainly do not justify the violent act, at least try to explain it. In short, through El Supremo's words, the book questions what importance the life of a "few traitors" may have when the happiness and even the survival of so many is at risk.

Hence it could be affirmed that, concerning the use of violence, there is a crucial difference between the latter novel when compared to the ones by Carpentier and García Márquez. Taking Dorfman's words into consideration when he underlines that the continuing state of violence in Latin America is created "por un sistema que fuerza al 90% de sus habitantes a no saber siquiera si vivirá más allá de mañana"<sup>32</sup>, we might perhaps say that through the use of violence El Supremo intends precisely to suppress violence. Though paradoxical, since it is known that the exercise of violence usually generates more violence, I understand that this is the dictator's actual purpose: that is, the condemnation of those who engage violent patterns of action

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31. CHAVES, Julio Cesar. El Supremo Dictador. Madrid, Atlas, 1964, p.284.

32. DORFMAN, Ariel. Imaginación y Violencia en America. Barcelona, Editorial Anagrama, 1972, p.17.

in order to maintain the majority of the population in chains and enduring daily miseries which seems to be the most barbarous form of violence.

And it is at this point that Yo el Supremo stands in opposition to the other two novels. In these, the use of violence does not aim, as a strategic goal, at shattering the social regime based on the exploitation of the working people but, on the contrary, its objective is exactly to maintain it. El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca are accounts for a prolonged violence which, to assure the preservation of the despot's domination and also to influence of their cliques, must resort, in ever increasing measure to savagery perpetrated against the people.

Nevertheless, utilizing Dorfman's appropriate image about the ensuing consequences of violence, it is possible to understand that the dictators suffer the effects of a general principle that, according to the Chilean critic, may be applied to almost all characters of the contemporary novel. Violence, he warns us, is like a boomerang whose final effect is precisely to destroy those who systematically appeal to it<sup>33</sup>. And it is through the previously analysed loneliness that the dictators receive the return of the boomerang. For "la violencia es así la otra cara de la soledad"<sup>34</sup>. Thus we may conclude by reinforcing what was discussed in the first section of this

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33. Ibid., p.25.

34. Ibid., p.33.

chapter, i.e., that solitude is the cruel and inevitable social punishment that those who constantly inflict violence must bear.

### 3.4 The violence of machismo

*Machismo* as a form of sexual oppression appears explicitly in the three novels examined. Generically, it could be here defined as another manner in which men in general, but especially the more powerful ones, subordinate their weaker partners through the use of various devices, in particular violence. The very acceptance of the term *machismo* already implies violence since it presupposes the power of one sex over the other. But the conceptual content of this word is much deeper. As Maldonado-Denis stresses, we should not see *machismo* simply in its restricted sense of male domination "sino como un síndrome que incluye la más desaforada y temeraria de las violencias"<sup>35</sup>.

Yet, although profoundly entangled with the theme of the violence of power holders, the concept of *machismo* entails its own peculiarities. Instead of a determined relation of exploitation of one class by another social class which holds power, what appears here is,

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35. MALDONADO-DENIS, Manuel, op. cit., p.31.

basically, the inherent dialectical opposition historically existing in the relation of man *versus* woman who may or may not belong to the same social class of their society. Notwithstanding the broad connotation of the word, which has been recently inserted in almost all definitions of dictatorship and repression, it originated in the more restricted sphere of the man/woman relationship. And it is from this point onwards that I will try to outline a brief commentary on how *machismo* becomes evident in the works under investigation.

#### 3.4.1 Male domination in El Otoño del Patriarca

El Otoño del Patriarca discloses several facets of this *machismo*. From the greeting "Que viva el macho!" (OP, p.18) - directed to the Patriarca at the start of the novel and frequently repeated in the course of the narrative - onwards, the reader may apprehend the ideological implications revealed in the notion of unequal sexual relations. The over-valuation of the *macho* makes it seem perfectly natural to the tyrant to suggest a rape when Aragonés confesses to have fallen in love for a woman. The Patriarca offers to put her

"a la fuerza en la cama con cuatro hombres de tropa que la sujeten por los pies y las manos mientras tú te des pachas con la cuchara grande, qué carajo, te la comes barbeada, le dijo, hasta las más estrechas se revuelcan de rabia al principio y después te suplican que no me dejes así mi general como una triste pomarroza con la semilla suelta" (OP, p.16).

The violence of the despot's proposal, refused by Aragonés, seems to be partially mitigated by the fact that, for him, all women must enjoy sexual violation. Therefore, he always acts as if he were raping the five hundred concubines whom he rudely uses as it pleases him, in vulgar and violent sexual assaults. And this exact word, "use" (OP, p.16), clearly shows how women are considered to be only instrumental objects at the service of men.

Another curious aspect which secures the social "credibility" of the male (and, therefore, his power) is his reproductive capacity. As a result, the Patriarca is the father of more than five thousand children (OP, p.50). This exorbitance increases the dictator's prestige in the eyes of a society which shares the same values but is not able to constrain him to assume the responsibility for these thousands of children. He does not recognize, in consequence, the fatherhood of any of them, the exception being the son he later has with Leticia Nazareno, "porque él consideraba que nadie era hijo de nadie más que de su madre, y sólo de ella" (OP, p.50).

In another passage, describing the dictator's approach to the hut of the newly-married Francisca Linero, in order to sexually attack her, the violence of *machismo* is clearly seen. The woman eventually submits to him because "él había venido para darle gusto a su voluntad y no había otro poder mayor que el suyo para impedirlo" (OP,

p.99). Meanwhile her husband, Poncio Daza, is taken to the nearby forest by the tyrant's bodyguard, Saturno Santos, and cut into thin slices with his machete.

Similar scenes are repeated throughout the narrative, showing women who are forced to submit themselves to the domination of the dictator, so that they are not exposed to the brutal consequences which could be provoked by an occasional resistance to the strongest partner. In my opinion, this reiteration is mainly due to the fact that the author wants to demonstrate that the violence of *machismo* belongs to a wider system which allows the survival not only of abhorrent individuals like the Patriarca but also of all that his very nature represents. *Machismo* must then be inserted in a larger social context which could be epitomized by the existence of relations which allow a few powerful men to oppress all the rest - women and men - through the continuing practice of violence.

#### 3.4.2 The violence of *machismo* in El Recurso del Método

In relation to the aspect of *machismo*, there is a definite identification of El Recurso del Método and the novel by García Márquez. A clear correlation of ideas and values in the two narratives is developed, for the Primer Magistrado also treats women as nothing more than mere

objects. Thus, his sexual fantasy falls exactly on those who symbolize the most complete image of passivity, i.e., the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. The novel starts with the tyrant's reminiscence about the previous night and his meeting with the prostitute disguised as a nun (RM, p.13). In short, this attraction to religious women, which incidentally also appears in El Otoño del Patriarca (with the Patriarca's passion for Leticia Nazareno), only reveals how the despots duly appreciate the feminine passivity and submission, embodied in the figure of the nun. Needless to say, this subordinate nature is another obvious dimension of a male-dominated relationship.

Throughout Carpentier's narrative, women appear merely as commodities exposed in the selected Parisian brothels and bought by the Primer Magistrado and Peralta during their stays in the Old Continent. Their love "conquests" evince the *machismo* which seems to be much valued among those who share their worldview.

After Hoffman's betrayal, the dictator decides to return from France to fight him and

"Para demostrar que, aun situado en los umbrales de vejez, aun menguado en su arquitectura de carne, seguía duro, fuerte y bragado, lleno de macheza, macho y remacho. Seguiría jodiendo a sus enemigos mientras le quedaran energías" (RM, p.129, my emphasis).

The link between *machismo* and power is established through the above words. In order to preserve



power, it is necessary first to be a *macho*. But reaching this implies the use of violence or, to be *macho y remacho*, in order to be able to destroy those who dare to resist against this power.

This aspect is also accentuated through the Primer Magistrado's comments about war, which I consider the ultimate violence:

"( - 'Es en la guerra donde se magnifican las energías viriles' -decía el Primer Magistrado -: 'La guerra es al hombre lo que es el parto a la mujer')" (RM, p.165).

Besides featuring the connection between violence and *machismo*, this quotation epitomizes the dictator's thought about women, who are relegated to the purely biological function they perform. Nevertheless, it is important to stress a fact underlying the ruler's declaration. Although his intention is to emphasize man's strength in contraposition to woman's weakness or inferiority - a common thought among the holders of power in class societies -, he does not really make his point. By comparing delivery and war, birth and death, the possibility of procreating human beings is infinitely more powerful and superior than killing them.

### 3.4.3 The *machismo* of El Supremo

In Yo el Supremo, the *machismo* intrinsic to an

oppressive social regime is not so evident as in the two novels analysed above. Nevertheless, El Supremo's *machismo* can also be detected. Yet, it is something much more intimate, a way of thinking which appears through psychological subtleties. His meeting with Deyanira-Andaluza (YES, p.53-59), for instance, is reduced to a long observation about her physical attributes, that is, he also reduces the woman to the condition of a mere object. But this meeting with the beautiful widow who would propose an agreement based on the trade in arms, is nothing else than fruit of his imagination, or a hallucination of the Paraguayan dictator. Apart from this rather erotic but unreal meeting with the Andalusian, there are very few passages in the book which mention women. They seem not to occupy a large space in the dictator's mind. I think, however, that he considered them to be a direct cause of man's perdition, this being the reason why he seems to practise sexual abstinence during his long-term government. There is some uncertainty about his posture because of the letter sent by Días Ventura to Bel-Asco, where El Supremo is accused of having innumerable concubines and children:

"otras versiones dignas de crédito de estas temporales desapariciones permiten suponer que ellas se deben, más vale, a los furtivos viajes que el ínclito Misógino hace a las casas de las numerosas concubinas en la campaña, con las que tiene habidos más de quinientos hijos naturales" (YES, p.75).

However, I believe that this figure, which the author elicits in order to force the reader to reflect and find his own conclusion, is not based on true premises. For this reason, I have not included El Supremo along with Carpentier's and García Márquez's dictators when I mentioned their preference for nuns. Because the same letter from Días Ventura telling that one of these several concubines was "una ex-monja apóstata que sería su favorita" (YES, *ibid.*), is in fact opposed to what becomes manifest in the rest of the narrative. For the same reason, the reference to El Supremo's five hundred children could not be compared to the Patriarca's five thousand ones.

The Paraguayan dictator's way of thinking must be connected to his historical epoch. Therefore, the fact that he says: "el hombre es el sexo razonable. Sólo él puede ejercer la reflexión" (YES, p.144), though it shows a facet of *machismo*, is not of so much consequence as it would be nowadays. Accordingly, it does not seem reasonable to compare his structure of values, settled in the prejudiced precepts ruling the society of one and a half centuries ago, to the *machismo* tenets explicit in the behaviour of the Primer Magistrado and the Patriarca.

P A R T    I I

C H A P T E R    3

HISTORY IN EL RECURSO DEL MÉTODO

"La historia tiene como verdadero objetivo el hacernos comprender el estado social del hombre y el de instruimos acerca de todos los cambios que la naturaleza de las cosas puede aportar a la naturaleza de la sociedad" (Aben-jaldún, 1375)

This chapter presents an analysis of Alejo Carpentier's work, particularly El Recurso del Método, mainly in terms of its fictional aspects *vis-à-vis* real life events and the successive historical stages experienced by Latin America. Through this confrontation I will try to establish to what degree the history of the continent is presented in the novel. I believe, however, that to achieve this objective it is not necessary to carry on a kind of exegetical dissection of the book, providing uncountable details about the historical events in order to determine which was the concrete situation behind this or that fictional episode. Because, as Eagleton emphasizes, "a text,

naturally, may speak of real history, but even if it maintains empirical historical accuracy this is always a *fictive* treatment - an operation of historical data according to the laws of textual production. Unless real history can be read as fiction in such a case, we are dealing not with literary but with historiographical discourse"<sup>1</sup>. My aim, therefore, is not not to undertake a historiographic comparison but an analysis which demonstrates Carpentier's dialectic involvement with objective reality and how his world vision and ideas about social development can be clearly discerned throughout the novel.

By recourse to a concise analysis of the most crucial conceptual elements appearing in Carpentier's preceding novels, El Reino de este Mundo (1949) and El Siglo de las Luces (1961), and their connections with El Recurso del Método, I will try to investigate his concept of history and its evolution. From my viewpoint, the author definitely provides, in each of the novels mentioned, new insights in his understanding of the meaning of certain historical events. The kernel of this conception is that historical processes develop necessarily through a sequence of revolutionary upheavals which, in his literary work, will appear with greater or lesser intensity.

When I analyse the notion of history held by Carpentier in El Recurso del Método, the series of revolutions - or better, insurrections - which shape the

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1. EAGLETON, Terry. Criticism and Ideology: a Study in Marxist Literary Theory. London, Verso Editions, 1978, p.70.

narrative are examined. They eventually lead to the liberal revolution led by Leoncio Martínez who, backed up by the United States, deposes the Primer Magistrado. At this point, I intend to make clear that Carpentier's historical perspective is not pessimistic just because he ends the book with a revolution that, in the end would not substantially modify anything. The Cuban writer's hope of an effective transformation becomes manifest through the character who, notwithstanding his brief appearance in the narrative, leaves a lasting record because of the logic of his ideas: the Student.

I still investigate the historical sources used in the novel since Carpentier relies on an extraordinary number of facts about Latin American history in the period around the First World War, when describing the development experienced by his imaginary country. Incidentally, this epoch coincides with the author's childhood and adolescence, this being the reason, perhaps, for the enormous amount of rare and interesting information which abounds in the narrative. Behind these so-called cultural and historical "curiosities" with which the novel is so well supplied there are deeper arguments, sometimes blurred by the varnish of the apparently superficial collection of details of a determined epoch.

Hence, I will broach some themes discussed in the novel which are representative of the changes occurring

during that time. These are especially the loss of European hegemony in Latin America and the rise of United States influence; the growing number of student organizations and their attempt to develop class consciousness among the popular classes; the consequent reinforcement of union movement and their demands and methods which were violently repressed by the government; the implementation of usually useless "great works", such as the construction of the National Capitol, and the subsequent arrival of Italian opera companies, which entertained the local élite, undisturbed by widespread famine and general deprivation among the people; and so on.

Finally, I will mention the fact that Carpentier touches upon historical events from a literary standpoint, meaning that his work could never be labelled a political pamphlet. The non-manichaeian view is emphasized as the chief characteristic in the development of the novel's protagonist. I will finish this section by showing that the author's most powerful weapon to retell history, in his literary project, is humour.

## 1. Successive Revolutions and Historical Development

A remarkable characteristic of Carpentier's work, especially in the novels examined in this section, is his unceasing attempt to recapture the history of the Latin

American continent through fiction. This search does not only encapsulate the history of the New Continent in all its peculiarities but also deals with the historical events taking place in Europe, especially those occurring in France, with their echoes in Latin America.

Therefore, in this study of the historical bases and their correspondence in a literary work, I will start by analysing Carpentier's preceding novels, El Reino de este Mundo and El Siglo de las Luces. These books indicate, at least in a preliminary form, the author's main lines of approach, later taken up again in El Recurso del Método. In terms of content and even literary developments there are not many recurrent themes in these books. For example, in the latter work the aspects of the *real maravilloso* - so prominent in the previous novels - are rare, almost non-existent, but concerning Carpentier's notion of history, they do reveal similar notions.

Although the circumstances described in the novels refer to the same region of the Caribbean, there is a clear temporal difference among them. The first two narratives mentioned above are related to a period of time encompassing the second half of the Eighteenth and the outset of the nineteenth centuries, while El Recurso del Método evolves during the first decades of the Twentieth century. The latter book probably spans a period longer than the years of 1913 to 1927, but these dates certainly



serve to delimit roughly the period in which the action takes place<sup>2</sup>.

Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to assume that Carpentier's main purpose was to apprehend the history of the continent, in particular that of the Caribbean region, in its totality. And I could also add that he understands history as a "process in continuity", from one book to another, meaning that the account of history in El Recurso del Método follows a sequence initiated in his previous work.

Carpentier's almost obsessive preoccupation in bringing to light, through literature, some obscure and forgotten chapters of history, has its foundations in his concept of history as a totalizing process. This is the reason why he affirmed that the two justifications which explain his preference for historical themes are that he adores "los grandes temas, los grandes movimientos colectivos" and also that "el hombre es a veces lo mismo en diferentes edades y situarlo en su pasado puede ser también situarlo en su presente"<sup>3</sup>.

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2. It seems that those limits (i.e., 1913 to 1927) belong to the author himself. See LABASTIDA, Jaime, "Alejo Carpentier: realidad y conocimiento estético (sobre El Recurso del Método)", in: Casa de las Américas, Havana, number 87, 1974, p.28.

3. Carpentier said this in an interview to César Leante entitled "Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco", in: GIACOMAN, H.(ed) Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier, New York, Las Americas Publishing Co., 1970, p.29-30.

1.1 Carpentier's historical view in El Reino de este Mundo:  
the character's stream of consciousness

Always relying on the slave Tì Noel in successive stages of his life, El Reino de este Mundo portrays, in detail, the process of independence of the Haitian republic. Generally speaking, such a process can be summed up as a series of failed attempts at liberation which happened during that period.

Much has already been written about the ideological position of the Cuban writer, taking into consideration the political processes introduced in this first historical novel. Some critics, for example, assume the controversial posture of trying to fit it into the long list of anti-revolutionary pieces<sup>4</sup>. The frequent recourse to aborted rebellions and the consequent frustration among the masses of slaves who do not achieve their freedom, they affirm, could represent Carpentier's attempt to discredit revolutionary processes that, usually, do not promote real changes nor lead anywhere. Thus, historical events, such as the poisoning of the white men led by

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4. Bosh, for instance, says that "El Reino de este Mundo consigue la plena evocación de la temática reaccionaria. Es una evocación antirrevolucionaria de las luchas independentistas de Haití[...]. El Carpentier de 1949 sigue fuertemente preocupado por la revolución, aunque ahora su actitud predominante es el rechazo consuetudinario y temeroso", in: BOSH, Rafael, "Análisis objetivo (o material) del primer Carpentier (1933-1962)", in: Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana, Lima, number 4, 1976, p.87. Nevertheless, his opinion about El Siglo de las Luces is the opposite (see p.90).

Mackandal and his consequent immolation in the fire; the resistance movement led by the Jamaican Bouckman, repressed by the massacre of 1791; the governments of Toussaint Louverture or Leclerc which preceded the independence of 1804; the subsequent dictatorship of the negro Henri Christophe who proved to be equally or even more despotic than the white governors; and the inauguration of the "Mulato Republic" during the presidency of Jean Pierre Boyer<sup>5</sup>; etc., would presumably reflect the author's disillusionment with revolutionary movements in general.

Nevertheless, I believe this argument is misleading, to say the least. In my opinion, Carpentier actually achieves quite different results. By the end of the novel, for instance, Tí Noel, touched by "un supremo instante de lucidez"<sup>6</sup>, is able to understand that the inner greatness of a man lies precisely in the permanent will to improve his wordly conditions. If not for himself at least for others whom perhaps he will never know. The slave considers that this process should not encounter any obstacles, nor be hindered by occasional failures. The author describes the history which has witnessed these failures but this does not necessarily mean that he agrees with them.

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5. For an appreciation of the historical context in El Reino de este Mundo, see the introductory study by Florinda F. de Goldberg in: CARPENTIER, Alejo. El Reino de este Mundo. Barcelona, Edhasa, 1979.

6. El Reino de este Mundo, op. cit., p.167.

Therefore, Tl Noel's stream of consciousness is profoundly dialectical, representing Carpentier's real and objective hope in the historical development of mankind, while stressing the necessity of solidarity ties which will render possible the gradual improvement of social conditions in "the kingdoms of this world".

### 1.2 El Siglo de las Luces: the characters' necessity of action

The novel El Siglo de las Luces was also promptly labelled by some critics as a reactionary work. Some of them - Rodríguez Monegal<sup>7</sup>, for instance - even affirmed that by way of an analogy with the French Revolution, the author actually criticizes the Cuban revolutionary process, when it is known, that what happened was precisely the opposite. As Carpentier declared in an interview (quoted above)<sup>8</sup>, he had completed the final manuscripts of the novel in 1958, well before the outbreak of the Sierra Maestra revolution. He explains that he published the book only three years later because he was too much absorbed, at the time, by the changes occurring in Cuban society to be able to think about other personal objectives such as editing the

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7. See SANTANDER, Carlos, "El tiempo maravilloso de la obra de Alejo Carpentier", in: LOVELUCK, Juan (ed) Novelistas Hispano-americanos de Hoy. Madrid, Taurus, 1976, p.150-1. Santander criticizes Emir Rodríguez Monegal's opinion on this matter.

8. In GIACOMAN, H. (ed) Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier, op. cit., p.28.

the novel and preparing it for publication. It is incredible then how certain criticisms, recently raised, insist on purveying myopic perspectives about Carpentier's work, even after the publication of innumerable enlightened studies on the subject<sup>9</sup>. Such is the case of an article, published in 1981, which asserts, to general astonishment, that "El Siglo de las Luces de Alejo Carpentier es la novela más autenticamente anti-revolucionaria jamás escrita por un escritor occidental"<sup>10</sup>.

Even conceding that El Siglo de las Luces could not perhaps be considered the revolutionary novel *par excellence*, it is impossible to admit that it can be placed at the other extreme. Therefore, I regard Ortega's position in this polemic as fairly balanced. The Peruvian critic suggests that "quizá estemos ante una novela básicamente 'ambigua', pero creo que sobre todo estamos ante una novela crítica"<sup>11</sup>. The critical posture of Carpentier, in this case, is directed mainly to the situation of alienation men live in.

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9. See the excellent essays by Alex Márquez Rodríguez, "Dos dilucidaciones en torno a Alejo Carpentier", in: Casa de las Americas, Havana, number 87, 1974, p.35-44; by Ariel Dorfman, "El sentido de la historia en la obra de Alejo Carpentier", in his Imaginación y Violencia en America, op. cit., p.130-150; by Julio Ortega, "Sobre El Siglo de las Luces", in: MULLER-BERGH, Klaus (ed) Asedios a Carpentier. Santiago de Chile, Editorial Universitaria, 1972, p.191-207, and by Carlos Santander, op. cit., among many others.

10. This was affirmed by Vintila Horia, "Utopía y antiutopia en la literatura hispanoamericana: Alejo Carpentier, Ernesto Sábato y Julio Cortázar", in: TASCÓN, Valentín and SORIA, Fernando (ed) Literatura en América Latina. Salamanca, Editorial San Esteban, 1981, p.224.

11. ORTEGA, Julio, "Sobre El Siglo de las Luces", op. cit., p.206.

This estrangement process (*Entfremdung*) creates a social *cul-de-sac* which does not allow men to find an efficient and decisive manner to fight against all the tricks the historical oppressors have consistently used to betray their yearnings for freedom.

The Cuban author narrates in the book the decadence of the French revolution in all its nuances, from idealism to cruelty, particularly through the historical but controversial character Victor Hugues. His behaviour presents a dichotomy which seems to be a very tragic one because, though he first appears as a revolutionary, it is partly through his acts that one form of dictatorship is eventually transformed into another, and Hugues becomes a more fierce dictator than those he previously fought against.

Yet, Carpentier's novel as a whole reveals his acute perception of the evolution of human societies, propelled from one stage to the next, within the historical spiral, by renewed revolutions. The author's purpose then, is not to offer any immediate and unambiguous solution for a problem that he has defined as "milennial" in El Siglo de las Luces. He only wants to open the eyes of the reader to the necessity to *hacer algo*, incidentally also present in El Reino de este Mundo.

At this point, Sofía and Esteban's action at the end of the novel appears to be pathetic and senseless, if one considers only the fact in itself. That is, their

deliberate exposing themselves to destruction since they knew that the Napoleonic troops were shelling the Spanish defenders whom they joined. Yet, if we think about the evolution of these characters throughout the narrative, considering their increasing consciousness, this "hay que hacer algo"<sup>12</sup>, affirmed by Sofia, assumes a wider significance in the context of the narrative and, consequently, has a deeper political relevance.

Santander subtly reminds us, in a footnote of his article "El tiempo maravilloso en la obra de Alejo Carpentier", of the date when Carpentier finished writing El Siglo de las Luces - 1958. He wants to imply that with this final dialogue between Sofia and Esteban what the author really wants to show is his total support to the Cuban revolution that burst shortly afterwards. For, adds the critic, "de qué se trata cada novela de Carpentier, sino de partir de nuevo después de cada fracaso, de cada decepción?"<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, Zahar's epigraph in El Siglo de las Luces, "Las palabras no caen en el vacío"<sup>14</sup>, does represent the emblematic crux of the novel, epitomized by the author in a sentence:

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12. CARPENTIER, Alejo. El Siglo de las Luces. Buenos Aires, Ediciones Corregidor, 1973, p.349.

13. SANTANDER, Carlos, op. cit., p.151.

14. See El Siglo de las Luces, op. cit., p.9.

"Los hombres pueden flaquear, pero las ideas siguen su camino y encuentran al fin su aplicación"<sup>15</sup>.

### 1.3 *The construction of Carpentier's novelistic project*

The former concise analysis aimed at demonstrating that there is a line of thought connecting the works mentioned to El Recurso del Método and subsequently to La Consagración de la Primavera<sup>16</sup>. In the latter, his last novel, published in 1978, Carpentier takes up again the theme of historical development through successive revolutions, a permanent argument in the preceding books<sup>17</sup>. Although the chronicle of the revolution does not explicitly appear in the 1978 novel, I believe that without the advent of the Cuban revolution the novel would not have been perhaps produced. In fact, La Consagración de la Primavera encompasses a long historical period that includes the Cuban governments of Machado, Batista and Castro. It incorporates political

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15. GIACOMAN, Helmy (ed). Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier, op. cit., p.9.

16. CARPENTIER, Alejo. La Consagración de la Primavera. Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1978.

17. The study of Carpentier's short novel Derecho de Asilo (Havana, Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1976) should also be inserted here. The succession of revolutions appears very clearly in this work, precisely because it is more succinct. Yet, I did not include it in this section because the objective here is to demonstrate how the history of the continent, particularly the Caribbean region, is shown in Carpentier's novels. El Reino de este Mundo and El Siglo de las Luces seem to me to be more representative of this aspect, since Derecho de Asilo, though concerning a Latin American dictatorship, does not offer much within the fictional account of history. Thus, this novel will be examined in Chapter 4, when I investigate the eternal repetitions responsible for the creation of the myth of circular time.



references to several other European and American countries and finishes with the couple Vera-Enrique smoothly integrated in the new life promised by the Cuban revolution. This is enough evidence, in my opinion, to prove that there is not the least ambiguity, in this novel, concerning Carpentier's gradual presentation of his perception of history. On the contrary, the author reveals, in a conclusive form, his total approval of the socialist revolution in Cuba, and the conceptual progression can be, thus, completely grasped. Through several bourgeois revolutions people become increasingly conscious of the need for a more radical change when their hopes are no longer frustrated. Because, as Slaughter explained,

"Every revolution brings with it euphoric and even ecstatic moods, expressive of the hope that the day of freedom is at hand. Marx declared that the heroism necessary to achieve the bourgeois revolutions would have been impossible without such illusions"<sup>18</sup>.

This hope for freedom and human liberation is therefore the inner force that moves Carpentier's characters. In El Reino de este Mundo we find the description of Tí Noel's thoughts about man's attempt to free himself and reach his goal which is to achieve a world transformation for the benefit of "gentes que nunca conocerá"<sup>19</sup>.

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18. SLAUGHTER, Cliff. Marxism, Ideology and Literature. London, Macmillan, 1980, p.9.

19. El Reino de este Mundo, op. cit., p.167.

In El Siglo de las Luces there is the unfolding of a stronger thesis that actually leads Sofía and Esteban to participate in the struggle, for they understand they must do something for the revolution they learned to recognize as fundamental<sup>20</sup>. El Recurso del Método, in its turn, introduces the description of a series of insurrections which allow the narrative to flow into a liberal revolution. Finally, La Consagración de la Primavera, as a literary completion of a conceptual development, gives another and crucial step forward in the historical spiral when it ends with the dawn of what the author sees as the most decisive transformation man ever reached, viz., a socialist revolution.

#### *1.4 The notion of revolution in El Recurso del Método and the role of the Student*

It may be observed, therefore, that El Recurso del Método can be perfectly inserted within Carpentier's novelistic pattern, where his view of a totalizing historical process unfolds gradually up to his last novel. His novels do not only encapsulate well delimited historical periods which are arranged chronologically, but also - and more

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20. In this case, a bourgeois revolution. According to Ortega, this is proved by the presence of Carlos (Sofía's trader brother) at the end of the novel. Carlos represents the bourgeoisie which will carry on the revolution against Spain, establishing its own power within the country. As the Peruvian critic stresses, it would only mean another revolution "a medias", which replaces the dominant groups but the rest remains the same. See ORTEGA, Julio, op. cit., p.203.

important - they define clearly the development of the author's worldview. If in each particular novel the author seems to continue the account of a historical time started in the previous one, i.e., going beyond the chronological limits reached in his earlier work, he, in the same way, gives in each book *un paso adelante* in the exposition of his ideas concerning the notion of human development.

Therefore, in this 1974 novel, Carpentier carefully draws a detailed picture of a series of non-completed revolutions, the common nexus of which is the permanent repression by the dictator of a fictitious country constituting a microcosm similar, in every way, to usual historical developments in Latin America. The novel reports the frequent attempts at change through rebellions led by adventurers who incidentally share the same personal objectives as the Primer Magistrado - Galván and Hoffman. The behaviour of these rebel leaders is so similar to the dictator's that the latter even calls attention to what they have in common before they rise against him, emphasizing their identity in terms of personal ambition. Indeed, these insurrections, if successful, would not mean any real change and the social ensemble would continue to be marked by unequal and oppressive social relations.

This was and has been the unfortunate panorama of the majority of the Latin American nations not only in the period concerned but throughout their history. The pattern of authoritarian regimes, characteristic of this continent,

has been noted by many social scientists, opening a wide field for different interpretations. The nature of these political systems based on ruthless labour exploitation has received, then, widespread attention. In my view, Cueva presents a possible historical justification for the non-existence of modern capitalist societies in Latin America, where there is the preservation of at least some civil rights, established in common law, and the concession of economic improvements to the popular masses. He notes that

"el fracaso de la alternativa democrático-burguesa[...] consolida, de todas maneras, el encaminamiento de América Latina entera por la vía reaccionaria - 'oligárquica' - de desarrollo del capitalismo, que perfectamente ensambla da con la fase imperialista en que había entrado el sistema mundial definirá un nuevo período de nuestra historia [...] La vía 'oligárquica' seguida por nuestro capitalismo no conduce desde luego a un estancamiento total de las fuerzas productivas, pero sí es una de las causas principales de su desarrollo lento y lleno de tortuosidades[...] en el otro extremo de la estructura social el desarrollo reaccionario del capitalismo produce un fenómeno correlativo del anterior, es decir, una rémora en la conformación de una burguesía realmente moderna"<sup>21</sup>.

Nor will the ultimate revolution described in El Recurso del Método modify this deplorable picture. Generally speaking, it will only replace a strong internal domination with a more subtle and diffuse external dependence, already referred to by Cueva. The revolution led by the liberal Leoncio Martínez will not free the people from the yoke imposed on peripheral countries which I have already analysed

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21. CUEVA, Agustín. El Desarrollo del Capitalismo en América Latina. Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1978, p.59-60 and p.85.

in Chapter 1, thus showing that the *gringos* have good reasons to claim that "el individuo les importa poco" (RM, p.251). But if the analysis of the revolution which overthrows the Primer Magistrado does not allow us to infer Carpentier's concept of revolution - since it would concretely represent nothing else than a "softening" of the existing dictatorship, and power would be preserved by the élites - the hope of consequential changes appears in the character of the Student who is present in the narrative only in a performs a crucial role.

In this respect, it is rather surprising how some critics easily cling to clearly biased explanations of literary occurrences. Their criticism, as could be expected, generally reflects ideological tenets and does not denote the least concern to discover which were the real objectives of the author in inserting certain facts or characters into the narrative. This is precisely the case of Mocega-González when she analyses the character "Student", refusing to see any difference, for instance, between the Student present in El Acoso<sup>22</sup> and the one depicted in El Recurso del Método.

In my opinion, the origin of her mistake lies in the fact that she misunderstands the real meaning of the character. She even says that no difference can be established if the principles of the Primer Magistrado and those of the Student are compared and adds that "el Estudiante idealista

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22. CARPENTIER, Alejo. El Acoso. Madrid, Edhasa, 1977. I question her view because the student appearing in El Acoso seems to me to be more frightened and weak than the one of El Recurso del Método.

será al final la figura pragmática del Primer Magistrado"<sup>23</sup>. Reasoning likewise, she reiterates that the differences between them "radican más en el desnivel que las separa que en los principios que exhiben"<sup>24</sup>. It is amazing how she misses the real motives underlying the confrontation of the two characters. She believes that one will be the substitute for the other, or vice-versa,

"en un vaivén eterno de a-abajo-a-arriba-a-abajo que en concordancia con su pensamiento [Carpentier's] parece ser el acto repetitivo sin término que la ya desesperada humanidad contempla en el tablado político del mundo"<sup>25</sup>.

In my opinion, Carpentier's work simply does not admit any possibility for this kind of argument. I believe that the insertion of the Student in the narrative is an alternative that opposes everything the Primer Magistrado represents in the whole book. Nevertheless, Mocega-González probably would reject this opinion since it would radically oppose her conservative worldvision which ironizes the popular "fancy" that believes in and increases the virtues

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23. MOCEGA-GONZALEZ, Esther P., "La evolución del personaje El Estudiante en tres relatos de Carpentier", in her Alejo Carpentier: Estudios sobre su obra. Madrid, Editorial Playor, 1980, p.109.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid, p.106.

"del hombre afiliado a las teorías de izquierda, que hasta ahora la humanidad parece aceptar como la del hombre 'puro y regenerador' [RM, p.233] capaz de resolver todos los problemas del Hombre en los reinos de este mundo"<sup>26</sup>.

Unfortunately, this is another regrettable error, for Carpentier tries to display the Student's weaknesses as well, thus destroying the incipient "myth of the Student" referred to by the Primer Magistrado (RM, p.233). Hence, I will endeavour to demonstrate the crucial importance of this character in the narrative, notwithstanding his rare appearances.

The only time the Student is confronted with the Primer Magistrado without subterfuges or any sort of constraints occurs in the fifth chapter of the novel (Part 15). His meeting with the dictator is short but explicitly defines the premises for an examination of the meaning of his insertion in the context of the book. In the brief time they are together an odd dialogue without words occurs between them. This "mute conversation" has great significance and definitive reverberations for the grasping not only of the role performed by the Student but also by the one who represents his opposite pole, i.e., the dictator. In this episode, both say frankly what they think or, better, they think what they would actually like to say. Since they do not externalize their thoughts, this fact, at a first glance,

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26. Ibid., p.197.

conveys the idea that they are sincere and trustworthy, expressing what really comes into their minds. Yet, when the dialogue continues in *viva voce*, we notice that the Student proceeds on the same line, verbalizing what he definitely thinks about the Primer Magistrado, a demonstration of an extraordinary courage<sup>27</sup>. The dictator, however, from the beginning of the episode demonstrates that he is representing a double role, a sort of theatrical fantasy he wants the other to believe is reality. Thus, he starts by revealing his worry over the scenery, for it will play an important role in his endeavours to convince the Student of the laborious and responsible nature of his government. But to the Student's sensibility this preparation does not remain unobserved: "todo aquí es teatro: el modo de recibirme, la luz en la cara, ese libro en la mesa" (RM, p.236). For this reason, after the "measurement" of their respective intellectual strength, the Student's evaluation of his enemy is summarized in a word: "comediante" (RM, p.241).

By maintaining his true opinions, both in thought or when talking, the Student demonstrates his strength. Meanwhile, the Primer Magistrado, by his deceitful attitude, pretending to be what he is not, clearly exposes himself to appearing weaker or even ridiculous. The short dialogue which ends their meeting proves this fact. When the

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27. However, it is important to stress again that Carpentier does not represent the Student in a manichean way, as the "good" side of the Primer Magistrado. He is not a "super-man" and his fears also appear in the text.



dictator asserts that for the Student he must surely be a sort of Caligula, the latter retorts: "Más bien el caballo del Calígula" (RM, p.243), leaving the tyrant completely astonished in the face of such unbelievable insolence"<sup>28</sup>.

But, despite these bursts of quite an uncommon defiant audacity, we notice that the Student does not intend to be individualized. He does not want to be singled out from the people whom he defends and represents in the narrative. An example of this representative role is shown when he remarks: "No vean en mí sino un estudiante más, cualquier estudiante, El Estudiante" (RM, p.187). Therefore, I believe it is quite reasonable to consider him, in the context of the book, as the archetype not only of other students but also of the people as a whole and, indeed, of all political forms of opposition to the despotic power structure prevailing in the country. The Student, and all those he is supposed to represent - since "resultaba evidente, ahora, que no andaba solo en tan múltiples y concertadas actividades; eran muchos, muchos más que los que quizá creíase, los que adoptaban sus tácticas" (RM, p.224) - is

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28. As is well known, Caligula, holder of absolute power and largely responsible for the fall of the Roman Empire, ruled from 37 to 41 A.D., and was murdered before completing 30 years of age. In this period, his depraved, corrupt and violent acts became widely known, characterizing the decadence of Rome. Among these acts is the nomination of his horse Incitatus as senator of the Republic. In the Student's answer to the Primer Magistrado is implied the idea that power is not so absolute as it seems to be, since the fact that the dictator was only "Caligula's horse" shows that there was someone with more power who commanded him. This point, however, was already analysed in Chapter 1.

precisely the point on which the author converges his hope for real changes towards a fairer society.

It is a curious paradox, however, to realize that it is precisely the North-American consul who recognizes this essential dimension of the Student's role. This happens when he answers the deposed Primer Magistrado about the reasons why the United States did not back up the Student, instead of Leoncio Martínez, to substitute the dictator at the head of the nation.

"A ése [the Student] sería difícil conseguirlo [that he wanted to do favours to the United States]. Es hombre de nueva raza dentro de su raza. De ésos están naciendo muchos en el continente, aunque vuestros generales y doctores se empeñen en ignorarlos" (RM, p.282, my emphasis).

Hence, it is not surprising that the Student reappears at the end of the narrative. When he is seen by the ex-Primer Magistrado, accompanied by the ex-ambassador and by the Mayoralía Elmira in Notre Dame, and later recognized at the corner coffee shop, many conjectures are raised by the trio who witness his surprising appearance in Paris. Yet, the reason for his presence there reveals the continuation of his struggle, for he is on his way to Brussels where he will attend the "First World Conference Against Imperialist Colonial Policies".

In opposition to the decaying universe built around the Primer Magistrado and his clique, who even

physically present "una anatomía desgastada que se esmirriaba de día en día" (RM, p.322)<sup>29</sup>, reappears the ethereal figure of the Student. In this character the author's hopes for a better future can be envisaged. His brief presence indicates what Carpentier expects some day to become a permanent reality.

The meaningful play of oppositions observed in the above mentioned mute dialogue they carry on in Nueva Córdoba is repeated in the end, in Paris, yet, on more subtle and complex levels. When at the Cathedral, for instance, the ex-Primer Magistrado is fascinated by the "perspicacity" of Elmira, whom the statues of Notre Dame remind of the sculptures by Pedro Estatua<sup>30</sup>. He was not capable of noticing alone that there were similarities of style between the work by the latter and the effigies displayed at the church, adding that it could be seen "sobre todo en las caras de diablos, el potro encabritado, los mengues cornudos, las zoologías infernales, del Juicio Final" (RM, p.323). These words prove the advanced state of mental deterioration experienced by the ex-Primer Magistrado,

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29. There is a pronounced degeneration, not only moral but also physical, of all those who serve the Primer Magistrado. This can be illustrated by Elmira's illness or by the porter substituting the self-reliant and elegant butler Silvestre: a war-mutilated man (RM, p.305).

30. Carpentier is obviously referring to the Miguel Estatua mentioned on page 79 (RM). Yet, perhaps the change of the names was deliberate in order to show the dictator's disregard for the leader of the rebels.

especially if one compares it to what the Student declared about the same theme - Doomsday. Although the former dictator had visited the church innumerable times, he is only able to notice these details about the sculptures after Elmira's comments. For him, those artistic figures only configure the real image of hell where horned devils enhance his fear of imminent death. For the Student, however, gothic art has a completely different meaning. Though he stays in Paris only for a few hours<sup>31</sup>, he gives himself up to a dazzled contemplation of that intricate style which he is facing for the first time, "y el gótico se le había alzado, a ambos lados, en arquerías y vitrales, con una revelación insospechada" (RM, p.324).

The fact that the Student rapidly apprehends what has passed unnoticed to the Primer Magistrado for decades, is not devoid of significance. Through the careful examination of gothic art, the Student dives into the meaning of religion, of the Gospels, and also divagates about the necessity of a new consciousness that would free man of prejudices and other sorts of constraints. The young man then concludes his analysis, which proves great artistic and human sensibility, by connecting the aesthetic and religious domains to tangible, material things and to necessary changes which will occur, he thinks, in the near

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31. We know that he does not spend the night there because he leaves his suitcase in the coffee shop where he is recognized by the ex - Primer Magistrado (RM, p.326).

future, because

"próximos estaban acaso los días en que habrían de sonar las trompetas de un Apocalipsis, pero esta vez tocadas por los comparecientes y no por los ángeles del Juicio Final. Tiempo era ya de fijar los protocolos del futuro y de ir instalando el Tribunal de Reparticiones..." (RM, p.325-6, my emphasis).

As may be observed, the Student's presence in these final pages is highly meaningful, since it really serves to give a frame to what the writer wants to convey in the whole narrative. Through the confrontation of these two antagonistic characters we can perceive Carpentier's recourse to a dialectical mechanism to show that, in spite of the apparent circle of endless and non-consequential false changes, there is hope of real changes. As the Student says to the Cuban revolutionary Julio Antonio Mella<sup>32</sup>,

"Tumbamos a un dictador. Pero sigue el mismo combate, puesto que los enemigos son los mismos. Bajó el telón sobre un primer acto que fué larguísimo. Ahora estamos en el segundo que, con otras decoraciones y otras luces, se está pareciendo ya al primero" (RM, p.326).

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32. The incorporation of Mella into the fictional text proves, once more, the author's ideological direction. As he explained in a lecture he gave in Caracas (1975), he was lucky in having had teachers like the founder of the Cuban Communist Party, Julio Antonio Mella. In: CARPENTIER, Alejo, "Conciencia e identidad de America" in his La Novela Latinoamericana en Vísperas de un Nuevo Siglo y otros ensayos. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1981, p.84.

But this circle, the author emphasizes, will not go on forever because despite the fact that no sooner one dictator falls another of the same nature holds power in his place - "hace cien años que se repite el mismo espectáculo - lo" (RM, p.327) - this situation will nevertheless prevail only "hasta que el público se canse de verlo mismo" (Ibid.). When the people finally react, demanding a fairer distribution of the results of their labour, facts like the theft of the Capitol's diamond by Elmira, ordered by the Primer Magistrado - and appropriately narrated only three pages after the Student's divagation on the "Tribunal of Redistribution" - will no longer occur.

Consequently, the Student has a substantial significance in the analysis of Carpentier's novel as regard the notion of revolution and general social development. The character embodies, as has been pointed out, the author's hope that mankind will be able to alter radically the existing social injustice, contributing through its own strength to the building of a fairer society.

## 2. Historical Sources in 'El Recurso del Método'

### 2.1 *Cultural curiosities*

Historical reconstruction in El Recurso del Método is established in a peculiar manner: through "cultural curiosities"<sup>33</sup>, i.e., a series of almost unknown facts which

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33. Defined likewise by Angel Rama in Los Dictadores Latinoamericanos, op. cit., p.44.

took place at the time of any of the diverse episodes occurring within the novel's chronological development. The structure of the narrative is engrafted with these hidden and sometimes eccentric historical details which inform us about things that happened in a certain period of history. And Carpentier certainly had the album of events which occurred in the epoch concerned well registered in his mind for it coincides with his own adolescence<sup>34</sup>. He is able thus to recreate the recent past, a time he has lived himself. The curiosities abounding in the novel serve, then, to situate the reader within a specific historical period, the first decades of this century.

A recent polemic emerged in some circles concerning the real importance of these curiosities, whether they are coherent with the protagonist's personality or whether they are only the result of the author's intellectual formation or even, perhaps, a non-essential literary idiosyncrasy. There is a consensus among some critics that Carpentier has fallen into the trap of his own erudition, overloading his novel and, in particular, its characters, with details probably alien to their expected behaviour<sup>35</sup>. Without totally denying the validity of this viewpoint, I

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34. Carpentier was born in 1904 and died in 1980. The main events of the novel occur during and after the First World War.

35. See, for instance, RAMA, Angel, op. cit., p.44 and USABIAGA, Mario, "Alejo Carpentier y su Primer Magistrado", in: Texto Crítico, number 3, year II, January/April, 1976, p.131.

think, however, that it could also be admitted that these erudite or, at least, highly-cultured pieces of information have a well-defined meaning and serve to fulfill obvious purposes. First, they demonstrate some of the most axiomatic contradictions of Latin American society. Through the contradictory role of the Primer Magistrado, who exhibits, on the one hand, his scholarly knowledge and claims to be the protector of the arts, of literature and of a refined Eurocentric culture but is, on the other hand, capable of murders and tortures, memorable drunkenness, and pillage of the national treasure, we have an actual image of the contradictions prevailing in the world he dwells in. A second important aspect is that these curiosities also serve to form a basis, a sort of scenario for the preservation of much more consequential facts within the continent's historical stages. Consequently, it can be seen that although these curiosities may sometimes appear to be excessive, they certainly have a determined objective for Carpentier. Hence, I do agree with Mejía Duque when he compares Carpentier to Borges in whose writings a sophisticated emphasis on cultural aspects has an equally important role. The Colombian critic stresses, however, that

"Mientras en Borges la copiosa información libresca vale como puro juego de 'formas', juego ecléctico, mistificante, solipsista y sin consecuencias, en Carpentier comporta un Mundo en cuyo corazón abigarrado el escritor toma posición"<sup>36</sup>.

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36. MEJÍA DUQUE, Jaime, "Los recursos de Alejo Carpentier", in: ARIAS, Salvador (org). Recopilación de Textos sobre Alejo Carpentier, Havana, Casa de las Americas, 1977, p.438.



## 2.2 *The Primer Magistrado: the culmination of various historical dictators*

When creating his *Primer Magistrado*, Carpentier was inspired by several elements found in Latin American tyrants of the recent past. The author himself, perhaps commenting ironically on an excessive preoccupation with the historical veracity of novelistic data, emphasized that his protagonist had been formed from 40% of Machado, 20% of Trujillo and 10% each of Gusmán Blanco, Cipriano Castro, Estrada Cabrera, Porfirio Díaz, having, moreover, traits of Somoza and Vicente Gómez<sup>37</sup>. This statement, by itself, delimits the fictional development within a historical time which comprises the periods these men were in power. And in all of them there are also overlapping characteristics, those that are common to more than one dictator. Trujillo's megalomania, for example, shown by a profuse distribution of his own statues<sup>38</sup>, is repeated not only in the novel, but also in other real life dictators. So, when the defeated *Primer Magistrado*, at the window of the United States consulate in Puerto Araguato, observes his statues being thrown into the sea by the rebels, the reader becomes aware of an implicit fact: the cult of personality stimulated by

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37. Letter to Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, dated 15th of March, 1974, quoted by Jaime Labastida in "Alejo Carpentier: realidad y conocimiento estético", op. cit., p.21-22.

38. See NIEDERGANG, Marcel. The Twenty Latin Americas. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971, volume II, p.252.

the dictator has innundated the country with his statues, as occurred in real life.

The construction of magnificent buildings, a barren use of social wealth, is commonly practised in Latin America. Historical examples, such as the building of the national pantheon by Gusmán Blanco (who ruled Venezuela personally or through agents for almost twenty years, 1870 to 1888) and the temple to Minerva by Estrada Cabrera (whose tyrannical sway in Guatemala lasted from 1898 to 1920) appear in El Recurso del Método through the National Capitol built by the Primer Magistrado. The constant travels to Europe by Gusmán Blanco and Cipriano Castro (dictator of Venezuela from 1899 to 1908), among others, are again reflected in the book, particularly the trip made by the latter in 1908, searching for the cure for his illness. It is also worth mentioning the "coincidental" proximity of the tomb of the Primer Magistrado to the tomb of Porfirio Díaz<sup>39</sup>, and so on, in a series of similarities that could be listed *ad infinitum*<sup>40</sup>.

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39. Porfirio Díaz was perhaps the most influential of the Mexican dictators, whose government lasted from 1876 to 1880 and from 1884 to 1911. Like the Primer Magistrado, at the end of his government, when Ciudad Juárez, in Mexico, fell to the rebels in May, 1911, Porfirio Díaz resigned and sailed to France, where he spent the remaining four years of his life.

40. Almost at the end of the novel, during the meeting of the Student with Mella, there is the confrontation of the dictators of their countries, interconnecting fiction and reality:

"Bastante parecido resultaba Gerardo Machado al que había sido el Primer Magistrado nuestro, en el físico, el comportamineto político y los métodos, pero distinto por cuanto, siendo muy inculto, no erigía templos a Minerva como su casi contemporáneo Estrada Cabrera, ni era afrancesado, como habían sido muchos dictadores y 'tiranos ilustrados' del Continente" (RM, p.327).

Accordingly, the fact that the dictator Gerardo Machado, who governed Cuba from 1925 to 1933, leads the group mentioned by the author is not surprising. A Cuban citizen, Carpentier was certainly influenced by the historical occurrences which took place in his country. It can be observed, then, that not only Machado but also his predecessor García Menocal (1913 to 1921) and his successor, Fulgencio Batista (1934 to 1940, when he controlled the government behind the scenery; 1940 to 1944 and 1952 to 1958, when he himself was the ruler), greatly influenced the novelist. All of them headed corrupt and repressive governments like the Primer Magistrado's tyranny. It was during Menocal's dictatorship that the sugar boom occurred and the opulence created by the expansion of sugar cane cropping is described in El Recurso del Método, as well as the growing social distance between the élite and the poor. As the author emphasizes,

"el país conocía una prosperidad asombrosa, ciertamente. Pero el creciente costo de la vida tenía al pobre de siempre en la miseria de siempre" (RM, p.161).

During his term, Machado was responsible for the most barbarous bloodshed ever practised in Cuba which was motivated by a strong opposition that emerged as a result of the policies he adopted during the world economic crisis of 1929. Yet, even relying upon the most violent

methods of repression, the despot could not hold power for a longer period, and the same fate is reserved for the Primer Magistrado.

An important aspect to be considered at this point is the strategic position of the United States. When the North-Americans withdraw their unconditional support for the dictator created by Carpentier, he is rapidly obliged to leave his post, as Machado was, when abandoned by Roosevelt and, in fact, many other dictators who inhabit Latin American history.

### *2.3 The expansion of North-American hegemony*

I believe that instead of verifying the sources of historical data referred to by Carpentier in the novel, it is probably more relevant to establish the reasons that explain his decision to write about an individual who actually subsumes the major characteristics of various dictators of the epoch. First, it should be mentioned that the social and economic development of the countries whose dictators were mentioned by the Cuban writer (Cuba, Santo Domingo, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico - that is, the Caribbean region, in general) was marked, earlier than the rest of Latin America, by the growing predominance of the commercial and economic interests of the United States. This powerful country indeed dictated all the rules

and mechanisms for the exportation of mineral resources and agricultural crops from that region. It becomes clear that a picture of the Caribbean is being drawn when one remembers that the neocolonial regime imposed by the United States was not felt so rapidly or with the same intensity in the Southern countries of the Latin American continent. In general terms it can be stated that these Southern Countries suffered the spread of North-American sway only at the end of the First World War, when there occurred the substitution of the then dominant European influence, while in the Caribbean it started before the war. In the novel, this aspect is already clearly exposed at the beginning, when the Primer Magistrado is "forced" to cede the banana zone on the Pacific to the United Fruit Company. The reason for this surrender, according to his allegations, was that the National Treasury was ruined and money was much needed to buy arms in order to crush the rebellion led by Ataúlfo Galván. This sale had not been effected earlier merely because it had been postponed

"por los peros, alegatos y objeciones de catedráticos y intelectuales que no sabían sino hablar de pendejadas, denunciando las apetencias - inevitables, por Dios, inevitables, fatales, querámoslo o no, por razones geográficas, por imperativos históricos - del imperalismo yanqui" (RM, p.33).

Consequently, only two hours after his arrival in New York, the Primer Magistrado abdicates his authority

over that productive region and signs the agreement prepared by Ariel<sup>41</sup>, his son and ambassador in the United States, thus completing the transaction with the United Fruit Co.. It is curious to observe that the text lays stress on the indisputable legality of these documents, since the man who signed them was "de hecho y derecho, el Presidente Constitucional de la Republica" (RM, p.37). However, this occurs not long after the "constitutional President", still in Paris, had mocked the objectives claimed by the man who rose against him but used formerly to call him "benefactor"<sup>42</sup>,

"clamando por el respeto a una Constitución que ningún gobernante había observado nunca, desde las Guerras de Independencia, por aquello de que, como bien decimos allá 'la teoría siempre se jode ante la práctica', y 'jefe con cojones no se guía por papelitos' " (RM, p. 31).

We notice that the supposedly universal value of the constitution is considered only when it serves to

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41. Through the choice of the name of his son the Primer Magistrado's erudition appears again, proving the contradictions mentioned before. Ianni emphasizes that Carpentier uses the name of a Shakespearean character which is, at the same time, a metaphor of Ariel, written by José Enrique Rodó in order to defend the European biased culture of the Latin American élite. Thus, he suggests, the author draws a twofold satire against the erudition of the Primer Magistrado and of the Uruguayan Rodó (see IANNI, Octávio, "A carnavalização da ditadura", in his Revolução e Cultura. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1983, p.95).

42. The reference to Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina becomes evident here. The cruel Dominican dictator obliged his subjects to call him "benefactor" (apud NIEDERGANG, Marcel, op. cit., p.252-3).

benefit the tyrant, i.e., to preserve him in power through the cession of part of his country to a powerful foreign company.

Hence, this unbelievable trading of national sovereignty at the start of the novel, indicates the situation that was becoming delineated in the whole of Latin America, particularly in the Caribbean in that period. It was the picture of a situation where the traditional alliance between the native economic élites and, in particular, the commercial sector of the metropolis, is gradually substituted by the domination of a foreign country which will directly rule the economy of the dependent nation. After the establishment of these big firms, such as the United Fruit and the Dupont Mining Companies, the foreigners settle down in the Caribbean country described in the novel and start to control its development.

The expansion of the banana empire outlined by Carpentier reveals, in consequence, a deeper and more complex set of external relations which characterize Latin America at the start of this century, with the eventual substitution of European control by North-American tutelage. This important change, showing the replacement of the country's dependence upon the European commercial bourgeoisie by a growing and much more internally rooted dependence on the United States, examined in the first chapter of this thesis, is reflected in the novel's main lines. From the beginning the dictator hesitates to accept

the new "protector" country, even though he eventually surrenders to the already mentioned "apetencias inevitables del imperialismo yanqui" (RM, p.33).

An example of this appears in the episode about his stop in New York when travelling from Paris to Nueva Córdoba. After signing the already mentioned agreement with United Fruit, "y como nada apremiante había por hacerse aquella noche" (RM, p.38), the Primer Magistrado decides to attend an opera. However, it turns out to be a terribly boring spectacle. So, in order to amuse himself he starts to observe the people present, and makes

"algunas divertidas y punzantes observaciones sobre la artificialidad de la aristocracia newyorquina, en cuanto a comportamiento y atuendos, cuando se la comparaba con la de París" (RM, p.39).

Yet, though these comparisons are raised with ironic contempt, he is incapable of avoiding the development of a much more general process which he can not treat with disdain. This process witnesses the increasing importance of the United States not only in the economic structure but also in the political arena of his nation. This is proven when he arrives in Nueva Córdoba, and "el agregado militar de los Estados Unidos nos aguardaba en el andén, junto a los miembros del Gabinete" (RM, p.46).

The dictator, however, resists accepting the new foreign predominance. Accordingly, after stifling



Galván's insurrection in the countryside, he returns to Nueva Córdoba only to become aware that the movement led by Leoncio Martínez has been enormously strengthened during his absence.

"Y viendo que el movimiento cobraba envergadura, con asomos de un sindicalismo inspirado en doctrinas foráneas, antipatrióticas, inadmisibles en nuestros países, el Embajador de los Estados Unidos ofrecía una rápida intervención de tropas norteamericanas para salvaguardar las instituciones democráticas. Precisamente, unos acorazados estaban de maniobras por el Caribe" (RM, p.72)

But the despot, with an unusual naiveté (at least apparently), rejects the offer<sup>43</sup> because

"Sería humillante para nuestra soberanía - observó el Primer Magistrado - 'Esta operación no va a ser difícil. Y hay que mostrar a esos gringos de mierda que nos bastamos para resolver nuestros problemas. Porque ellos, además, son los que vienen por tres semanas y se quedan dos años, haciendo los grandes negocios' (RM, p.72).

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43. It is known that in several Latin American countries there was the menace or the real landing of North-American marines in order to solve the internal "problems" of these nations. At the end of the novel, a surprised Primer Magistrado observes the arrival of the ship "Minnesota":

"Los marines aquí: como hicieron en Vera Cruz, entonces; como en Haití, cazando negros, como en Nicaragua, como en otras muchas partes, a buena bayoneta con zambos y latinos; intervención, acaso, como en Cuba, con ese general Wood, más ladrón que la madre que lo parió" (RM, p.268).

In Vera Cruz, Mexico, for instance, there was a military occupation by the North-Americans when the Mexican president Huerta refused to obey the American president Wilson, in 1914.

The result of this will be his eagerness to demonstrate the capacity of his government to end the crisis without foreign help, through repressive methods against the growing opposition. What follows is the inconceivable violence of the Nueva Córdoba massacre (RM, p.81-2), already examined in Chapter 2. Also in relation to this episode we could say that Latin American historical development is so absurd that perhaps here "reality copies fiction", as a considerable number of these unbelievable massacres of workers has also marked the history of the continent<sup>44</sup>.

Nevertheless, besides this unfortunate aspect in Latin American history, that is to say, the continuing dependence on foreign powers - be it on European countries or on the United States - several other features, which had or had not a direct relation with this wider process, also appear in the novel.

#### *2.4 Student movements*

One of these aspects worth mentioning is the

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44. See IANNI, Octavio, "A carnavalização da ditadura", op. cit., p.92. The author lists the innumerable massacres of peasants and workers which happened in the Latin American history, from the Chilean massacre of 3600 workers in Santa María de Iquique to the Hernán - dez dictatorship in El Salvador which massacred around 20 thousand peasants during his government. For an account of the 1928 massacre of workers in Colombia, see also MENNA, Inês. La Función de la Historia in 'Cien Años de Soledad'. Barcelona, Plaza & James, 1979.

importance Carpentier assigns to students and intellectuals in general. Therefore, it is not fortuitous that the Student has, in my view, a fundamental role within the narrative structure, notwithstanding his rare personal appearances. Yet, even before he is mentioned for the first time, there are many references to the political action carried out by students and intellectuals in the book. At the beginning, for example, as I have observed before, the character of Professor Leoncio Martínez is introduced. Leoncio is an interesting figure particularly because his role among the students undergoes a radical transformation in the course of the action. At the start of the novel he is considered an ally and a legitimate leader. He is even indicated as the successor of the Primer Magistrado, being considered the key person "para regresarse a un orden constitucional y democrático" (RM, p.50). With the students' mobilization, professor Leoncio Martínez is able to amass a stronger support, increasing his prestige among journalists, lawyers and a small dissenting group within the army. This group teaches military techniques to the students and is led by a Captain Becerra, a minor character who is only mentioned once. Nevertheless, Becerra is important because he involuntarily becomes the political reason for a more intense radicalization of the students. This happens when he is summoned to a meeting with the Primer Magistrado, in order to expose the students' demands, after being offered

"todas las garantías deseables por vía de parlamento militar" (RM, p.76), and is treacherously shot dead by the dictator's men. This murder enrages Miguel Estatua, the popular leader, who decides to head the rebellion which will culminate in the previously mentioned massacre of Nueva Córdoba. Again, the students decide to follow the more radical group in the political system and join the sculptor in his decision to struggle, reiterating "su decisión de pelear hasta donde alcanzaran sus fuerzas" (RM, p.79). Estatua's words, even if coarse and spoken with difficulty, seem to the students to be truer than those polished but now defined as demagogic, pronounced by

"un Luis Leoncio Martínez apendejado, que seguía dirigiendo proclamas al país, pidiendo auxilio a gente casi ignorante de su existencia, declarando que contaba con el apoyo de provincias que no se habían movido" (RM, p.79).

Later on, Leoncio will be even more criticized by the students who demand effective changes in the regime. It happens particularly after the teacher assumes power with the explicit support of the United States<sup>45</sup>.

Consequently, it may be observed that Carpentier puts emphasis upon a social group which typically characterized the movements of opposition to dictatorships at the beginning of the century. According to the historian

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45. See last quotation on page 177 of this thesis to illustrate this aspect.

Halperin Donghi<sup>46</sup>, the student movement was perhaps the most significant anti-oligarchic current that was formed at the time. It manifested itself because of the demands for university reform, which started in Argentina, after the First World War and later spread to most of Latin America. This movement demanded more participation and democratization within the universities, aiming at a fairer relationship between professors (generally members of the *élite* which held power) and students. Yet, as Carpentier demonstrates in fiction, this movement was not restricted to within the walls of the schools. It eventually led to a growing involvement of the students in politics. Thus, it should be noted that before the popular mobilization against the dictatorship occurred, "the students became, in more than one country, the spokesmen for the still silenced social strata"<sup>47</sup>.

Hence, it may be concluded that the students' preponderance, as the *agitateurs* of popular revolt against tyranny in El Recurso del Método, only demonstrates an important facet of Latin American history. Like the Student, or even Leoncio, many of the most representative Latin American leaders, from Victor Raul Haya de la Torre to Fidel Castro, had their first political experiences through participating in student movements.

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46. DONGHI, Tulio Halperin. História da América Latina, op. cit., p.177-178.

47. Ibid., p.177.

## 2.5 *The National Capitol*

Another fact from Guatemalan history which occurred during the government of the dictator Estrada Cabrera, and is transposed to fiction, is the construction of the Capitol. Like his partner in real life, who built a magnificent temple and instituted worship of Minerva, during his frightful twenty-two years of dictatorship<sup>48</sup>, the Primer Magistrado also decides to start what "había de ser su gran obra de edificador, materialización, en piedra, de su obra de gobierno" (RM, p.153).

In order to put his plan into practice the dictator seeks the advice of many architects. Yet, for varied reasons, none of the projects they submit pleases him. One evokes the Parliament of Budapest, but his country is at war with Hungary. The other, a replica of the Spanish El Escorial, brings to mind the violence of Felipe II in Latin America and is abandoned as a result. Another looks like Milan cathedral and this fact might displease the freemasons. Only the thirty-first project is immediately accepted, proving, once more, the new values emerging in that epoch: it would be an exact copy of the Capitol in Washington.

However, the problem about who would build the statue to be erected under the enormous dome remains. The

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48. From 1898 to 1920. In El Señor Presidente, op. cit., Asturias depicts the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera, laying stress particularly on the main characteristic of that period, i.e., the widespread fear.

Primer Magistrado wants something magnificent and, confronting a real fact with fiction, he discards the one erected by Estrada Cabrera which, though it is "una hermosa iniciativa de un gran gobernante", "su estatua de Palas Atenea no es nada del otro mundo..." (RM, p.155).

The construction of the Capitol absorbs the whole financial resources available at the national treasury which, incidentally, are on the rise because of the above mentioned sugar boom during the First World War. And due to its ambitious magnitude, the work-in-progress continues for a long time. Yet, the dictator wants to have it finished for the celebration of the first centenary of independence. As this seems rather impossible to achieve, the Primer Magistrado dismisses the Minister of Public Works and threatens his subordinates with prison or exile if they do not complete the work by the due date. Consequently,

"se inició un trabajo de egipcios. Con ayuda de centenares de campesinos traídos a plan de machete, uncidos a rastras y carretas, alojados en barracones de donde eran sacados a toque de corneta para alternados turnos de trabajo, empezaron a pararse las columnas que aún estaban por pararse, se irguieron obeliscos, subieron dioses y guerreros, danzantes, musas y caciques" (RM, p.168).

And in this way,

"con los ojos puestos en calendarios y relojes, impacientes, insomnes, llevando las obras con gritos de caudillos y alma de mayores negreros, apresuraban los arquitectos y capataces el trabajo, hasta que se dio por concluida la construcción del edificio" (RM, p.169).

That is, through an opportune return to the slave system, the huge work symbolizing the Primer Magistra - do's regime, is completed. Reflecting the exact nature of his government, it shows the juxtaposition of misery, repression and barbarity, on one side, with immoderate luxury, the worship of Grecian gods and costly Italian operas, on the other.

## *2.6 The Italian operas*

To promote opera concerts by Italian companies is a long cherished dream of Carpentier's despot. This becomes possible with the completion of the Capitol, the place where they can be performed. The tyrant wants to offer his fellow countrymen,

"un espectáculo semejante a los que se presentaban en Buenos Aires y Río de Janeiro - urbes de ojos siempre puestos en artes y refinamiento del Viejo Mundo" (RM, p.195).

Thereafter, all efforts are channeled to the operatic enterprise. Yet, when fiction is compared with history we notice that the arrival of opera companies is delayed for half a century in the fictitious country, in relation to Argentina, for instance. Like Buenos Aires where, after 1850, "the new theatres are filled with Italian opera



companies, which at first are quite decadent but rapidly improve when they discover the enormous possibilities offered by the uncultured but generous people"<sup>49</sup>, the temporary prosperity of Nueva Córdoba also makes possible the coming of Caruso, Borsalino, Titta Rufo and the most famous singers of that time, for opera performances<sup>50</sup>.

The presence in Nueva Córdoba of the opera companies is, therefore, an immediate consequence of the sudden economic prosperity brought about by widespread difficulties experienced by world commerce in war time. Though it could undoubtedly be foreseen that this economic boom would vanish with the end - in fact already at hand - of the world conflict, or perhaps precisely for this reason, the ruler decides to promote operas in his country. The alleged motive was the same as the paid publication of photographs of the Capitol in European and American periodicals. Also with these cultural events,

"sabría el mundo cómo se había agigantado esta población que, en los principios del siglo, no pasaba de una aldea grande" (RM, p.175).

The opera season transforms the cultural

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49. DONGHI, Tulio Halperin, op. cit., p.126.

50. The cultural curiosities appear here through Carpentier's knowledge about operas, opera companies, names of musicians and actors, etc., which marked the cultural history at the start of this century in Latin America and Europe.

temperature of the capital, to the immense delight of the Primer Magistrado. "Nos vamos haciendo gente, Peralta; nos vamos haciendo gente" (RM, p.199), says the tyrant to his secretary when he observes the amazing sumptuousness around him:

"Después de las funciones, los cafés elegantes se llenaban de un público que lucía lo más caro y centelleante que pudiese verse en alhajas y atuendos - público que era contemplado desde la calle por un pueblo asombrado de tener ahí, al alcance de la mano, como quien dice, un mundo de lujos que sólo había imaginado hasta ahora a través de las novelas rosa, películas de ambiente millonario o las portadas del 'Vanity Fair' vistas en quioscos de periódicos" (RM, p.199).

These contrasts<sup>51</sup>, however, remain unnoticed by the despot. He does not realize that in order to *hacerse gente* it would be necessary for the same access to wealth to be made possible to those only observing that sort of ostentatious shopwindow.

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51. The film "Fitzcarraldo" by Werner Herzog offers an excellent visual image of these Latin American contrasts. As in Carpentier's novel, European operas are performed by Caruso and other famous singers of that epoch, in the luxurious theatre building, in the Brazilian city of Manaus. It is a splendid building in the middle of the Amazon forest, constructed with imported marble and other extravagances in the style of the Primer Magistrado's Capitol, and surrounded by extreme poverty. Like the book, the film shows how the rich waste the money which came easily with the increase in the price of rubber (in the novel it is because of the sugar boom), increasing social inequalities.

## 2.7 *Anarchist and communist ideas*

It is therefore only natural that this climate of crying social injustice stirred up and fermented the new ideas diffused by the militants of the R.S.A. (*Revolución Anarco-Sindicalista de Barcelona*) (RM, p.162), and by those inspired by Marxist doctrine, that had recently been victorious in the Russian revolution of 1917. Both tendencies, denoting a yearning for change in the prevailing situation of unequal privileges spreading out in the whole Latin American continent, are inserted in the text by Carpentier. I understand that the author's particular aim here is to show a historical process, obviously opposed by the conservative sectors, that starts to be politically important in Latin America in that time. The Primer Magistrado himself mentions what is, in his opinion, "doctrina sin porvenir, ajena a nuestras costumbres" (RM, p.186).

When the tyrant's secret service can not discover the agents responsible for the clandestine pamphlets published by the leftist groups, who label him "dictator"<sup>52</sup>, they conclude that

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52. The word "dictator" has a terrible connotation for the Primer Magistrado:

"Más le hería esta palabra que cualquier epíteto soez, cualquier intraducible remoquete, porque era moneda de enojoso curso en el extranjero - y, sobretodo, en Francia" (RM, p. 185).

"No eran los anarquistas: estaban todos presos; no eran los partidarios de Luis Leoncio Martínez, ya encerrados en distintas cárceles del país; no eran los medrosos opositoristas de otras facciones, más que fichados y vigilados, que no contaban con los medios técnicos necesarios para tener una imprenta clandestina en continuo y exasperante funcionamiento... Y así fue como, a fuerza de conjeturas, de hipótesis lanzadas al tapete del cálculo de probabilidades, juntándose letras sueltas como piezas de um 'puzzle' inglés, se llegó a la palabra C-O-M-U-N-I-S-M-O, última en proponerse a las mentes..." (RM, p.186).

## 2.8 *Burning of books*

In order to fight against the "ghost of communism"<sup>53</sup> which begins to spread throughout Latin America, the Primer Magistrado bans "subversive" books from circulation and later orders their burning. Again Carpentier refers to a normal procedure in Latin American dictatorships: the medieval practice of burning books, archives, collections, newspapers which, through the diffusion of ideas or sometimes of mere information, are supposed to endanger the stability of the regime. Just to mention a recent case, in Argentina, after the military coup of 1976, these deplorable book fires were reported to be quite frequent, lasting up to the virtual disappearance of all "dangerous literature". Yet, several other countries endured similar shameful situations in the course of their histories. Commenting on this fact, Galeano

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53. Defined so by Marx and Engels in The Communist Manifesto (Harmonds - worth, Penguin, 1979, p.78), which appears in the novel hidden behind the cover of another book: Cría de Gallinas Rhode-Island Red (RM, p.185).

stresses that

"Yo creo que esas dictaduras no sólo son enemigas de la realidad, porque desconfían de ella, sino también de la historia. No solo prohíben el presente sino también el pasado"<sup>54</sup>.

Following the path of history, the absurd collection and burning of "red books" happens in fiction. Due to the crass ignorance of the policemen, volumes that have not the least connection with any brand of communism are also burnt, only because they have the word "red" imprinted in their title-page<sup>55</sup>. In El Recurso del Método, a desperate bookseller opposes this arbitrary act:

"Llévense, de una vez, La Caperucita Roja - había gritado, fuera de sí, uno de los comerciantes. 'Va preso por gracioso' - dijo el Teniente Calvo, entregándole a un agente" (RM, p.181).

In addition to this wild persecution of "red literature", there follows the obvious seizure of Marx and

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54. See GUIU, Jordi and MUNNE, Antoni, "La aventura de la comunicación - entrevista con Eduardo Galeano", in: El Viejo Topo, op. cit., p. 51.

55. Several criteria were adopted for the withdrawal of "subversive" books in Latin American dictatorships. In Argentina, for instance, novels by Dostoievski, Tolstoy and Gorki were thrown in the fire by enraged military agents. In El Recurso del Método books "tales como La Semana Roja en Barcelona (opúsculo sobre la muerte del anarquista Ferrer), El Caballero de la Casa Roja, El Lirio Rojo, La Aurora Roja (Pío Baroja), La Virgen Roja (biografía de Louise Michel), El Rojo y el Negro, La Letra Roja de Nathaniel Hawthorne" (RM, p.181) are incredibly condemned to the flames because they have "red" in their titles.

Engels' books. It happens particularly after the Primer Magistrado remembers that the Illustrious Academician had warned him against the "peligro marxista" (RM, p.187). Peralta shows Capital to the dictator, and after a rapid reading both conclude that they have not understood anything at all of what was written in the book. Surprised, the despot asks:

" Y cuánto vale el mamotreto alemán ese? - 'Veintidós pesos, Señor.' - 'Pues, que lo vendan, que lo vendan; que lo sigan vendiendo...No hay veintidós personas, en todo el país, que paguen veintidós pesos por ese tomo que pesa más que la pata de un muerto'..." (RM, p.189).

The dictator's attitude also reflects what has occurred in various Latin American countries. Even in some lasting right-wing regimes, several academic left-wing books, Capital among others, have not been censored<sup>56</sup>. This "liberal" pose indicates that the owners of power are assured of the efficiency of their methods in suppressing the people's capacity not only to understand these books but also to grasp their own history.

## 2.9 The union movement

The union movement in Latin America started to

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56. In Brazil, for instance, in the period of the most repressive dictatorship of its history, from 1968 to 1975, the volumes of Marx's Capital were freely sold in the bookshops, while newspapers, cinema and theatre suffered an implacable censure.

be organized and accumulate political strength after the First World War. It was in part an answer to the catastrophic situation of the workers which is well portrayed in the novel.

Like García Márquez who describes the strikes stirring up the Caribbean region in the post-war period, mainly in Cien Años de Soledad<sup>57</sup>, Carpentier also transposes the increasing consciousness of the workers into fiction. These strikes are the means through which the working class demonstrates its opposition to the oppressive labour relations imposed by the employers. They start on an Ash Wednesday, with the strike in the American Refinery which later spreads to other sugar mills. All police are promptly mobilized, but

"nada podían contra hombres que ni manifestaban, ni alborotaban, que 'no alteraban el orden público', sino que permanecían quietamente en los portales de sus viviendas, negados a trabajar, cantando, con acompañamiento de bandurrias, cuatro o guitarra" (RM, p.222).

With the successful results of the strike, the union movement, which aims at organizing the workers against

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57. In La Función de la Historia in 'Cien Años de Soledad', op. cit., Lucia Ines Menna makes a careful analysis of the strike by the United Fruit Company's workers, which occurred in November, 1928, in Colombia, being violently crushed by the government. She collates real data with fiction, showing that what seems to be a mere literary creation is, in fact, part of Latin American history. As in El Recurso del Método, in García Márquez's novel the workers are deceived by the call of the authorities which summons them to concentrate in Macondo and, in both novels, there occurs the most frightening massacre of the workmen on strike.

their growing exploitation, gains momentum. As a result, there occurs a succession of strikes, such as the ones started by the miners of Nueva Córdoba, by the dock labourers of Puerto Araguato and Puerto Negro. Thereafter, an analogy is introduced. The author compares the movement of successive strikes to a type of disease which spreads uninterruptedly throughout the body. Although these words may reveal Carpentier's baroque writing style, it seems that the real meaning of the identification strike/disease is implied in the Primer Magistrado's worldview. Hence, the strikes are

"Como esas enfermedades tropicales cuyas ronchas ambulatorias enrojecen, alternativamente, de modo imprevisible, ese hombro antes de pasar al muslo derecho, la cadera izquierda en vísperas de subirse al pecho[...] Nada podía detener esta epidemia; de nada servían las amenazas de las autoridades[:...]: las gentes habían cobrado conciencia de la tremenda fuerza de la inercia" (RM, p.223).

And if at the beginning they are timid movements, later on they lead to the successful general strike (RM, p. 254 onwards). In the same way as a similar strike resulted in the fall of Machado, in 1933, the dictator of El Recurso del Método is also defeated as an outcome of the strike. Mejía Duque points out that



"La huelga general acaba por vencer aquel contra quien las armas nada habían podido. Es pues el triunfo de la ideología liberal sobre el cuartelazo. Es la etapa que se vivió en la América Latina en el período de entre las dos guerras mundiales"<sup>58</sup>.

The already mentioned deep silence which is the result of an action not seen before in the history of the country (RM, p.254) is what most scares the tyrant. It was caused by the general paralysation of all sectors of the population, including the commercial one and the middle sectors in general. Yet, a last minute stratagem maintains the Primer Magistrado a little longer in power:

"Y aquel día, a eso de las 3 de la tarde, empezaron a sonar muchos teléfonos. Unos, al principio, intermitentes y desperdigados. Luego más numerosos, más subidos de tono, más impacientes en largar gritos. Una multitud de teléfonos. Un vasto coro de teléfonos. Un mundo de teléfonos. Y llamadas de patio a patio, voces que corrían sobre los tejados y azoteas, pasaban de cerca en cerca, volaban de esquina a esquina. Y ventanas que empiezan a abrirse. Y puertas que empiezan a abrirse. Y uno que se asoma, gesticulando. Y diez que se asoman, gesticulando. Y las gentes que se tiran a las calles; y los que se abrazan, y los que ríen, y los que corren, se juntan, se aglomeran, hinchán su presencia, forman cortejo, y otro cortejo, y otros cortejos más que aparecen en las bocacalles, bajan los cerros, suben de las hondonadas del valle, se funden en masa, en enorme masa, y claman: 'Viva la Libertad!'...Ya lo saben todos y lo repiten todos: el Primer Magistrado acaba de morir" (RM, p.262, author's emphasis).

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58. MEJÍA DUQUE, Jaime, "Los 'recursos' de un novelista", in: ARIAS, Salvador (ed). Recopilación de Textos de Alejo Carpentier, op. cit., p.440.

The false news of the Primer Magistrado's death had been spread through telephone calls, to the joy of the people. No longer feeling threatened, they go out onto the streets to be shot by the Police, in a new and brutal repression. Yet, this time it is an illusory victory. With the support of the United States government the people can intensify their action and the dictator is eventually obliged to capitulate.

### 3. Final Considerations

It may therefore be concluded that Carpentier does succeed in portraying the prevailing atmosphere of the first decades of this century when he describes the events that marked the epoch. It is still important to emphasize, however, that he does not consider these occurrences as isolated factors in history. On the contrary, all events are connected among themselves, sometimes in causal relationships. My purpose in this chapter was to show this sequence, trying to make explicit the historical sources the author relied on. He analyses the chain of occurrences surrounding the First World War and, mainly, how this event had reverberations in the Latin America political scenario. There is a rapid increase in the price of sugar and other export raw materials produced in Latin America. As a consequence of this sudden wealth, an unnecessary series of grandiose works were under-

taken, exemplified by the construction of the Capitol. With the end of the war, as expected, the economy undergoes a stagnation which leads to the great 1929 crisis of capitalism but, in the process, the growing impoverishment of the population is contrasted with the enormous and ever-expanding wealth appropriated by a few. The reaction to the social inequality caused by the élites, led by the Primer Magistrado, is felt through the opposition movements that proliferate not only among radicalized students and intellectuals but also in the workers' union movement.

So, the narrative develops, bringing to light many curious facts, some, perhaps, of lesser importance, but decidedly contributing to enhance those which really marked the history of the continent. For this reason, I cannot agree with Usabiaga when he suggests that this fusion of fact and fiction in the book generates confusion, since El Recurso del Método puts "en la misma bolsa cosas que importaría mucho no confundir"<sup>59</sup>. The critic, in fact, tries to demonstrate that the novel produces a series of confusions. He gives as an example the release of the Student by the Primer Magistrado and the lucidity of the latter in relation to "subversive" books. According to Usabiaga, this never occurs with students and books in Latin America. Thus, though Carpentier based his fiction on true facts which he selected

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59. See USABIAGA, Mario, "Alejo Carpentier y su Primer Magistrado", op. cit., p.135.

in order to build his model of dictator through a fusion of variables that may be found in history, i.e., a sort of Weberian ideal-type, in the essayist's opinion, he does not succeed either in representing reality, or in obtaining veracity.

I imagine that the Argentine critic certainly has the best of intentions. Yet, he is mistaken when he criticizes the excessive indulgence of the Primer Magistrado. He stresses that the dictator's attitudes does not correspond to the crude reality created by Latin American despots, in whom this "kindness" to the enemy (the Student and the Marxist books) would never happen. This could result, he underlines, in the reader's sympathetic attitude or even approval towards the dictator which, he insists, should not be tolerated. The critic agrees, however, that the author "obtiene un conjunto entretenido que sin duda divierte", but thinks that "Carpentier debiera haber tenido en cuenta que no es momento para que nos leamos folklóricamente", and also that a writer of so much fame as his "no tiene derecho a manejar tan indolentemente la vigencia actual del fascismo en Latinoamerica, la presencia de los Pinochet, López Rega, Banzer, Stroessner, etc."<sup>60</sup>.

I consider it important to mention Usabiaga's ideas concerning El Recurso del Método at the conclusion of this chapter which dealt with the connection between literary creation and history. In this chapter, I have tried

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60. Ibid., p.139-140.

to relate the fictional to the historical facts, without forgetting, however, that literature is not a handbook of history or a political pamphlet. To understand literature historically, and even to compare it to some extra-literary processes, does not mean to forget that a work of art establishes other sorts of relationships with reality than would be the case, for instance, in an economic or sociological analysis. Here the weapons are of a different kind, and Carpentier's most important one, in El Recurso del Método is, unquestionably, humour. As Benedetti emphasizes,

"La utilización del humor en El Recurso del Método es una nueva muestra de la madura eficacia de Carpentier, sobre todo porque le permite construir una novela política que no parece serlo"<sup>61</sup>.

Through the use of humour the darkest truths are made explicit and, in a "completely new way we finish this work with a vigorous impression of the horrors existing in all kinds of dictatorships"<sup>62</sup>. Although Carpentier definitely does not hold a manichean position in his presentation of the Primer Magistrado - and, in fact, sometimes we can not avoid feeling pity or perhaps some sort of solidarity for the dictator - I think that the tyrant is eventually

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61. See BENEDETTI, Mario. El Recurso del Supremo Patriarca, op. cit., p. 23. See also other comments about humour, on the same essay, in pages 21 to 23.

62. This affirmation by CASTELLANOS, Jorge and MARTINEZ, Miguel, op. cit., p.174, may be seen as an answer to Usabiaga's criticism.

defeated in the readers' assessment.

By having recourse to creative literary stratagems where humour plays a central role, the author ensures that the despot is eventually destroyed<sup>63</sup>. Because, as Ianni lucidly affirms, all dictatorships start to collapse when the people begin to laugh at the dictator: "humour generates laughter and undermines the false seriousness and pretended eternity of the most powerful tyranny. Laughter means the denial of the ruler and of his form of government. Through satire, the people transform the tyrant and his partners into characters, caricatures, puppets. Their masks are reversed"<sup>64</sup>.

It may be seen, then, that by means of humour and irony the faithful picture of a certain historical epoch of the past is drawn. Yet, if we take into due consideration all aspects involved and shown in the novel, we will reach the conclusion, as Pogolotti does, that El Recurso del Método

"está construido a partir de una paciente sumatoria de hechos concretos, situados en la circunstancia específica - la de un momento de nuestra historia - pero que la trasciende en la medida en que el imperialismo, apoyado en la represión abierta o solapada sostiene las anacrónicas estructuras económico-sociales del Continente. De ahí, a pesar de la exactitud con que se describe la situación que enmarca su trayectoria, la actualidad de sus palabras"<sup>65</sup>.

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63. See also Bakhtin, op. cit., p.94.

64. IANNI, Octavio, "A carnavalização da ditadura", op. cit., p.100.

65. See POGOLOTTI, Graziella, "Carpentier renovado", in: Recopilación de Textos sobre Alejo Carpentier, op. cit., p.433-4.

## C H A P T E R    4

### THE DOMAIN OF HISTORY IN EL OTOÑO DEL PATRIARCA AND THE ABSENCE OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SOME CHARACTERS BY GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ AND CARPENTIER

In this chapter my intention is to demonstrate that the evident lack of historical consciousness shown by some characters, particularly in the novels of García Márquez, is rooted in the myth of circular time and also caused by the repression of past memories. Basically, my arguments will rest upon the analysis of El Otoño del Patriarca, but the previous book by the Colombian writer, Cien Años de Soledad, and two novels by Carpentier, Derecho de Asilo and El Recurso del Método, will be touched on as well. In the works of both, one can identify a clear reference to the characters' lack of understanding of history as a totalizing process. In the novels, they fail to see historical development as a process undergoing a permanent, constant transformation that will eventually lead to the destruction of all social forms of oppression created by men. This lack

of understanding is due, on the one hand, to the reiterated repression of the past, which is a basic premise for the development of a historical consciousness. And, on the other, to the false perspective of time as a circle of mere repetition of events.

As is well-known, the Marxist concept of social consciousness encompasses a double dimension, one referring to class consciousness, viz., the ideas that reflect the material existence of particular classes and the other meaning the historical role of the former. Since there is a distinction between the empirical consciousness of class members at any particular time and their latent historical class consciousness, my aim in this chapter is to study the literary manifestations of historical consciousness in the novels concerned. It is initially important to emphasize that the nature of the relation between past, present and future, in Marxist theory, is evolutionary and not cyclical, for

"history is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity"<sup>1</sup>.

The cyclical theory of history, propounded by

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1. MARX, K. and ENGELS, F. The German Ideology. London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, p.57 (edited and introduced by C.J.Arthur).



Vico at the end of the eighteenth century, constituted, at the epoch, a conceptual advancement in the study of history, for it was the first time that an author had indicated the possible evolution of society towards democracy through class struggle. Yet, in our time, after centuries of scientific development in the study of history<sup>2</sup>, it is expected that historical processes can be grasped dialectically and not as a series of cycles where facts are infinitely repeated, hindering the achievement of higher social regimes. The understanding of history as a circle of repetitions is rejected by the Marxist model of dialectics, i.e., a system that follows the logic of development of history and nature and whose remarkable feature is that it is premised on the understanding that reality is a totality characterized by continuing change.

### 1. The Myth of Circular Time

In Días de Guardar, Monsiváis defines the main characteristics of social underdevelopment, namely, the static or circular character of time. The Mexican writer lucidly questions what is the notion of time in backward societies:

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2. These studies vary from those, like Diderot, which reached the conclusion that humanity had always been the same, not having endured any sort of evolution, repeating eternally the same cycle of life and death, to Hegel's dialectic method, which was radically transformed by Marx and Engels.

" A qué equivale el subdesarrollo sino a la fragmentación del tiempo, a su inacabamiento, a las horas que jamás disponen de sesenta minutos, a los minutos incapaces de inventariar los segundos que los integran? El tiempo del subdesarrollo suele ser, en cuanto a forma, circular, y en cuanto a técnica de aprendizaje, suele poblarse de pequeños niveles. Es circular porque los hallazgos son los mismos, porque la imitación se suple con la imitación, porque los procesos históricos jamás concluyen, jamás la rebelión da paso a la independencia, jamás la insurgencia culmina en la autonomía[...] El país no accede a la autonomía plena, el individuo no accede a la autonomía cabal. La identidad no varía porque no se ha engendrado la demolición de las estructuras actuales y porque la vida íntima continúa sujeta a la magia del círculo vicioso. Todo cambia, todo se transforma: todo sigue igual. El eterno retorno es la precaria y atroz sensación continua que nos informa de que esto ya lo vivimos, de que esto ya lo intentamos, de que esto ya fracasó"<sup>3</sup>.

The words of Monsiváis render clear the aspect I want to discuss when analysing the lack of historical consciousness in the characters conceived by García Márquez and Carpentier. My intention is to show that the explicit objective of the authors, in the novels concerned, is to demonstrate that the persisting historical alienation of people submitted to underdeveloped economic structures and dictatorial oppression leads to a gradual but inevitable weakening of culture and its popular roots. So, if the critic says that, within underdevelopment, "all remains the same", it, in fact, means "all becomes worse". This is the point I want to emphasize in the study of the characters' worldvision: how their unconsciousness and blatant ignorance

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3. See MONSIVÁIS, Carlos. Días de Guardar. Mexico, Ediciones Era, 1970, p.152.

about the evolutionary sense of life eventually leads to their destruction.

In my view, García Márquez definitely advanced in the exposition of his historical perspective, if we compare, for instance, the concluding words of Cien Años de Soledad and El Otoño del Patriarca. Yet, before commenting on this aspect, in order to understand clearly the underlying idea of circular time embedded in his dictator novel, it is necessary to consider first his previous work, Cien Años de Soledad.

As widely analysed by the critics, who almost dissected the writer's first major novel, what we identify in both books by García Márquez are facts that seem to spin around themselves, in an endless repetition, which makes the beginning and end of the narratives meet, thus completing the whole circle<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, each time that there is a repeti-

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4. At the beginning of Cien Años de Soledad, Úrsula shows her concern with the possibility of giving birth to a child with a pig's tail, due to her incestuous relationship with her cousin José Arcadio Buendía. However, this does not occur in the course of the novel or in the development of the family until the final pages. When the affair between Amaranta Úrsula and her cousin, the last Aureliano Babilonia, results in a baby with a pig's tail, the circle is completed. Another example is Melquíades' manuscript which starts to be written at the very beginning and is finally completed/deciphered at the end of the book. In El Otoño del Patriarca, the remarkable example of the novel's circular structure is the dictator's death which starts and ends the narrative. Besides, the timid awakening of the people at the start of the novel who, at the end are much more conscious of their role in the world, also reveals this structure.

tion it occurs in a degenerated form, evidence of the continuous decadence of the society the characters live in. Their manner of understanding life, their society and, in particular, the nature of dominant social relations, reveals the perspective of circular time which discloses their ahistorical outlook.

Like the Buendía clan in Cien Años de Soledad, the Patriarca is not able to develop a consciousness of history as a transforming process. He is unable to apprehend the facts of the world as a totality full of interconnections and determinations, since he only observes (but does not interpret) the facts of his daily routine which, if taken into superficial consideration, seem to be repeated *ad aeternum*. Moreover, he does not consider the material and social causes of these occurrences, which could place them in a broader context, and certainly modify his worldview.

The connection between static time - for it did not pass, "sino que daba vueltas en redondo", as Úrsula Iguarán affirms in several parts of the narrative - and its power of destroying any element of potential change, is quite clear in Cien Años de Soledad. The matriarch of the Buendías observes that all members of the family tend to repeat systematically the same gestures, the same conversation and even the same acts, in the course of the many decades covered by the book. The historical ignorance of Úrsula and other characters impedes them recognizing the underlying

differences between one event and the other. This is clearly registered by Aguinaga who writes that they

"viven con voluntad de aislarse de la Historia, y, por tanto, como quien si en una isla busca se la tierra firme bordeándose el mar volvería siempre al punto de partida, creen en la circularidad del tiempo[...] Así, aunque nada en rigor se ha repetido en la historia de la familia ni del pueblo, los Buendía entienden todo hecho singular, histórico, como variante de lo ya vivido"<sup>5</sup>.

According to the critic, García Márquez's objective is to make the reader believe in the theory of the "circularity" of history, but he has not managed (or perhaps wanted) to demonstrate that either his novel or history is "circular". He adds that what we actually find in García Márquez's Cien Años de Soledad is, in fact, a radical contradiction: the author unequivocally shows that he is conscious both of the dialectical movement of history, and of the dialectical relation between reality and fiction. Yet, at the same time, he seems to want to persuade us that these relations do not exist<sup>6</sup>. Although I concede that Aguinaga's criticisms against those who "borgianos a su modo, insisten en hablar en círculos"<sup>7</sup> are correct, I do not agree that such a contradiction is actually defended by the Colombian

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5. See AGUINAGA, Carlos Blanco. De Mitólogos y Novelistas. Madrid, Ediciones Turner, 1975, p.35.

6. Ibid., p.37 to 40.

7. Ibid., p.39.

writer. In my opinion, with the final destruction of the world of Macondo, García Márquez does not present a nihilistic, fatalistic or even pessimistic view of social development. On the contrary, he reveals that this final annihilation is nothing else but the consequence of the characters' lack of historical consciousness. *They* see the world as an infinite series of immutable repetitions, *not* the author. For the Buendías, as I have mentioned, events seem constantly to repeat themselves and their destiny is accepted as something determined *a priori*, against which there is no use struggling. In their persistent attempt to repress the past, which is generally evaluated as a series of frustrating or degrading recollections, they do not allow the creation of the material conditions which would avoid the recurrence of the same mistakes, obstacles or difficulties. They can only understand the past in a purely individual and self-destructive manner. As I have observed, though the characters' lack of historical perception makes them believe in the circularity of time, this "repetition" occurs in an ever degenerating form, a fact that they do not grasp. Taylor explains that "circularity" is thus deceptive, for it is not a motif which is eventually overridden and in effect cancelled by the more dominant idea of desintegration which gathers force throughout the novel"<sup>8</sup>. The final destruction

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8. TAYLOR, Anna Marie, "Cien Años de Soledad: History and the Novel", in: Latin American Perspectives, Riverside, volume II, number 3, 1975, p.101. Taylor's essay on García Márquez's most famous novel confirms some arguments I have set out in this section.

of Macondo, which can be foreseen in the course of the narrative, is, thus, the inevitable result of the Buendías' failure to create their own history and, in consequence, to develop a consciousness of the past<sup>9</sup>.

### *1.1 The circular time of dictatorship*

We have just seen that Úrsula Iguarán reiterates throughout the novel the repetitive and monotonous nature of every day facts she witnesses during her long life. Like her, the dictators of El Otoño del Patriarca and El Recurso del Método also do not conceive the unfolding of time as an ongoing process. In opposition to the Buendías' matriarch, whose circular view of time passing is only a consequence of her absolute ignorance of historical facts, both dictators are interested in the idea of time as a permanent and unbroken circle. As such, it will always rotate around their own power and, consequently, will not modify the established *status quo*.

In El Otoño del Patriarca, the dictator, who is only able to apprehend the circularity of time but not its historical progression, does not perceive that his

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9. Lucila I. Menna's illuminating study, La Función de la Historia en 'Cien Años de Soledad', op. cit., provides the interpretation of all historical allusions in the novel. She compares, for instance, myth with history, elucidating a series of historical sources used in literature. As I am mentioning Cien Años de Soledad in this section merely to compare it to the circular time in El Otoño del Patriarca, I will not go further on the point.

alienated resistance to human development secures the perpetuation of a social system which is actually self - destroying. An idea of the Patriarca's conception of circularity is given if we note that when he presides over the council of a *new* generation of ministers of a *new* government of a *new* century, he thinks that they are the *same* ministers as ever (OP, p.241). In consequence, it will be the rude ambassador Mac Queen who will indicate to him that this apparently perpetual circle is indeed wearing away. Thus, when the dictator is reluctant to accept the sale of the sea, the ambassador replies that

"Ya no estamos en condiciones de discutir, excelencia, el régimen no estaba sostenido por la esperanza ni por el conformismo, ni siquiera por el terror, sino por la pura inercia de una desilusión antigua y irreparable, salga a la calle y mírele a la cara a la verdad, excelencia, estamos en la curva final" (OP, p.247, my emphasis).

This "final curve" could certainly represent the last round of a vicious circle of repetitions that would go on gyrating forever if history were really constituted by static and never renewed structures.

The hopelessness of this circle can be clearly grasped through an analogy which appears in García Márquez's novel. The idea of an unchangeable society would be like the piles of rubbish that were carried back and forth from one province to another by the fanatical pupils of a freely



instituted sweeping school, who did not know what to do with the rubbish swept<sup>10</sup>. The uselessness of this frantic and absurd "back and forth" movement suggests an analogy with the notion of circular time. In the same way, the mere repetition of the same events inscribed in these literary pieces does not lead anywhere in terms of social progress, thus denouncing the structural crystallization of Latin American societies immersed in ante-diluvian social forms.

### 1.2 Temporal immobility in El Otoño del Patriarca

The structure of the dictator novel of García Márquez also suggests the idea of immovable time. The continuous flow of the narrative, which has omitted all grammatical punctuation, makes it seem that time is static. Consequently, time in the novel appears to be a-historic, mythic<sup>11</sup>, which "no transcurría sino que flotaba" (OP, p. 145).

At the start of the novel we are presented with

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10. The Patriarca "ordenó establecer en cada provincia una escuela gratuita para enseñar a barrer cuyas alumnas fanatizadas por el estímulo presidencial siguieron barriendo las calles después de haber barrido las casas y luego las carreteras y los caminos vecinales, de manera que los montones de basura eran llevados y traídos de una provincia a la otra sin saber qué hacer con ellos" (OP, p.40).

11. A good definition of the difference between historical and mythical time was given by Bolletino: "El tiempo histórico cambia según la época y según el individuo mientras el tiempo mítico se repite infinitamente" (BOLLETINO, V. Breve Estudio de la Novelística de Gabriel García Márquez. Madrid, Playor, 1973, p.101).

a description of the Patriarca's death. The narration of his death recurs at the beginning of each chapter serving as a pattern for it. Through these deaths, always witnessed by the people, there is the unfolding of a process, thus explained by Ortega:

"la primera muerte del dictador inicia también el primer día de la conciencia: el relato de lo visto que desentena la suma de lo oído para recomponer el escenario de lo ya vivido. Si la respuesta no escrita del pueblo es sobrevivir al poder; su sabiduría radica en su capacidad de discernir, que aquí se formula como el proceso extensivo de contar. La narración colectiva se instaura, por ello, como el espacio privilegiado del conocer"<sup>12</sup>.

The reports of the dictator's death are repeated on five occasions and each time there is a return to facts which happened before it, except in the final one. Notwithstanding the apparent reiteration of well-known details, reinforcing the concept of a time that seems to be static - the *tiempo estancado* referred to in the first page of the novel - the several deaths of the Patriarca, instead of serving to fix a circular structure, lead to the true death of the one who considered himself an immortal being<sup>13</sup>. There -

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12. See ORTEGA, Julio, "El Otoño del Patriarca: texto y cultura", in: EARLE, Peter (ed) Gabriel García Márquez. Madrid, Taurus, 1981, p.229.

13. Even the newspapers proclaimed his immortality - see, for example, OP, p.129. When Lorenza Lopes, who had been given a sewing machine by the Patriarca, complains that "las cosas y la gente no estamos hechas para durar toda la vida", the tyrant retorts "al contrario, que el mundo es eterno" (OP, p.91).

fore, the apparent repetition actually shows a continuous erosion in the life of the dictator who "no cayó en la cuenta de que su lucha feroz por existir dos veces alimentaba la sospecha contraria de que existía cada vez menos" (OP, p. 24).

## 2. Repression of the Past Memory

In order to understand the reasons for the unceasing decay of the characters in García Márquez's novels, a preliminary step is to consider a fundamental point in the formation and development of historical consciousness: the culturally-inherited knowledge of original processes, i.e., the past as a social parameter not by means of occasional and fortuitous remembrances kept in memory, but the past as a cultural phenomenon, rooted in social values. As has been seen, in his novels, the characters evince a lack of understanding of history as movement and this leads inevitably to destructive mechanisms. I will try to investigate now how this fact is connected to the absence of a living past, precisely because the characters try to eliminate from their memories all uncomfortable feelings brought on by the recollection of unfortunate events. As a result, when the remembrance of the origins is suppressed, similar difficulties are found, the same mistakes are made and, as a result, unsurmountable

barriers are erected to human development.

In Cien Años de Soledad, old Pilar Ternera, who accompanied the century of frustration of the Buendía family, glimpses that

"la historia de la familia era un engranaje de repeticiones irreparables, una rueda giratoria que hubiera seguido dando vueltas hasta la eternidad, de no haber sido por el desgaste progresivo e irremediable del eje"<sup>14</sup>.

Repression of the past, in consequence, leads to an increasingly worsening state of affairs that will finally cause the total ruin of Macondo. In El Otoño del Patriarca and El Recurso del Método, in their turn, the death of the dictators is the result of their deliberate resistance to incorporating past facts in the social memory of their people.

### *2.1 The knowledge of the origins*

When Mircea Eliade studied the behaviour of primitive tribes, he concluded that one of the basic factors for the formation of a mythical consciousness was the apprehension of the "prestige of the origins". He showed that in these ancient social groups the knowledge of the origins, i.e., of the historical past, bestows on the individual

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14. See García Márquez, G. Cien Años de Soledad, op. cit., p.343.

who possesses it a sort of domination over those who are not able to preserve this past. Generally, those who managed to keep their past alive would be the "natural" leaders in these societies. The philosopher still emphasizes that, for the Greeks, memory (mneme) and recollection (anamnesis) provided the excellence of knowledge. That is, those who remember and interpret the past are the only ones who know the formation and evolution of the human groups and are able, as a result, to foresee future developments<sup>15</sup>.

A good illustration of this aspect appears in Cien Años de Soledad with the occurrence of an epidemic of insomnia which causes oblivion. The consequence of the unusual illness, narrated at the beginning of the novel, anticipates what will become clear later - the characters' incapacity to act as subjects of history, caused by their inability to preserve the memory of the past.

In the same manner, the dictator described in El Otoño del Patriarca is unable to retain any relevant past event. He can not remember, for instance, a fundamental thing for the re-creation of his own history, such as his childhood. He only recalls it at the moment when he catches the smell of the smoke and then forgets it again<sup>16</sup>.

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15. ELIADE, Mircea. Myth and Reality. London, Allen & Unwin, 1964, p.21 and footnote.

16. "Sintió el olor del humo, se acordó de una infancia que podía ser la suya que sólo recordaba en aquel instante cuando empezaba el humo y la olvidaba para siempre" (OP, p.68).

When Bendición Alvarado, suspecting that her death is imminent, tries to reconstruct the past, revealing to her son the secrets that she does not want to carry to her tomb, he

"no le ponía atención, le suplicaba que se durmiera sin escarbar en el pasado porque le resultaba más cómodo creer que aquellos tropiezos de la historia patria eran delirios de la fiebre" (OP, p.136).

As it may be observed, the tyrant's systematic refusal to keep the past in mind happens because this exercise of memory would be inevitably sad, bringing back old humiliations and all sort of miseries he had experienced. Yet, it is also evident that this continuous repression of the past causes constant erosion in his structure of domination, as false facts can not be maintained forever. The Patriarca, in an almost imperceptible way, feels this wearing off and tries to re-elaborate history, according to his fallacious interpretation. After Bendición Alvarado's death, the Nuncio refuses her canonization, declaring that the Magdalenan image fixed on her sheet is not due to any miracle but rather to an ordinary painting. The dictator then menacingly warns the priest that "usted carga con el peso de sus palabras" (OP, p.146) and, consequently, after a week, the Nuncio is almost lynched by mobs of hired fanatics, placed on a raft and cast adrift on the sea.

But the dictator, who is determined to prove that his mother is a saint, entrusts Monsignor Demetrius Aldous with the task of "recuperating" her past "hasta que no quedara ni el menor rastro de duda en la evidencia de su santidad" (OP, p.147).

As a result, when the dictator orders the Monsignor to investigate and reveal his mother's origins because he wants to prove her sainthood to the world, he assumes

"el riesgo terrible de conocer la imagen verídica de su madre Bendición Alvarado en los tiempos prohibidos en que todavía era joven" (OP, p.152).

Monsignor Aldous had been chosen to arrange the canonization of Bendición Alvarado because he was known for his preference for the mundane habits of drinking, smoking, eating well and principally, for loving life above all, to the detriment of spiritual improvement. Yet, the Monsignor's fate is similar to the Nuncio's who had had the courage to oppose the sainthood claimed by the Patriarca, i.e., he is also destroyed. In unveiling her origins, the priest penetrates in the past which the tyrant wants to suppress in order to continue deceiving the people about it.

Actually, it sometimes seems that the author wants to mould a caricature and imply that the dictator is indeed very naive and really believes in a false past.

Because of his warped worldview, he is eventually defeated, even before his death which is, as I have observed earlier, the metaphorical result of his lack of historical consciousness. In order to grasp all connections between present and past facts he needs someone like Demetrius Aldous, who was "el único hombre de este mundo que se había atrevido a ponerlo frente al espejo de la verdad" (OP, p.158).

Nevertheless, the despot supports and allies himself to those who benefit from historical falsehood, confirming the distorted account of passing events. Thus he advises the Monsignor, "usted no me ha dicho nada padre, yo no sé la verdad, prométamelo" (OP, p.159, my emphasis).

The categorical refusal to accept and inscribe the truth as a prime objective is a major characteristic of dictatorships and the Patriarca, as a ruler, is an example of this. The people are deprived of their past, which leaves them without historical roots and, as a result, makes them gradually weaker. An illustration of this aspect is the Patriarca's claim that "no importaba que una cosa no fuera verdad, qué carajo, ya lo será con el tiempo" (OP, p.171). And the people who had been alienated from their own history agree with the dictator:

"Tuvo razón, pues en nuestra época no había nadie que pusiera en duda la legitimidad de su historia, ni nadie que hubiera podido demostrarla ni desmentirla si ni siquiera éramos capaces de establecer la identidad de su cuerpo, no había otra patria que la hecha por él a su imagen y semejanza con el espacio cambiado y el tiempo corregido por los designios de su voluntad absoluta, reconstituida por él desde los orígenes más inciertos de su memoria" (OP, p.171).



At this moment, the people are impotent in the face of the Patriarca's resolutions. They are forced to surrender to the ruler who, they suppose, probably knows everything about the historical development of his country since his long existence allowed him to witness past events. Yet, in spite of his very long life experience, his ignorance and lack of historical consciousness prevent him from grasping the necessity of preserving the past which makes that he can have only an intuition of the farce of repetition of daily facts.

In some parts of the novel we can notice useless strategies to retain history. One of these attempts made by the Patriarca to preserve history may be observed in the episode when Letícia Nazareno and her son are barbarously eaten by dogs amidst one of her usual plundering incursions into the town market<sup>17</sup>. Immediately after the hideous incident, he orders that a garden should be built on the site, bearing a marble cross crowned with a light higher and more intense than a lighthouse, with the purpose of

"perpetuar en la memoria de las generaciones futuras hasta el fin de los siglos el recuerdo de una mujer histórica que él mismo había olvidado mucho antes de que el monumento fuera demolido por una explosión nocturna que nadie reivindicó" (OP, p.200, my emphasis).

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17. See, in Chapter 2, the section "The lonely power of the Patriarca", p.93.

It may be seen, then, that the result is totally opposed, at least for the dictator, since he contributes to erasing this "historical woman" from his own memory by forbidding his driver to pass in front of the garden. His deliberate loss of memory, however, is contradictory, for it is one of the prognostications of his inevitable annihilation which he tries to overcome - like José Arcadio Buendía in the plague which caused forgetfulness<sup>18</sup> - by means of writing in

"los pitillos de márgenes de memoriales que él escribía en otra época para no olvidar nada cuando ya no pudiera acordarse de nada" (OP, p.203).

These small pieces of paper which he inserts into crannies in the palace walls are a useless device to keep useless details for the reconstitution of the historical past, because they only give a partial view of the past and not its totality. Thus, the loss of memory is the result of his myopic historical perception. The oldest and most powerful man on earth is, consequently, stripped of his power because he does not even remember who he is, as the melancholic Patriarca confesses to the school-girl with whom he has an affair at the end of his life (OP, p.223). The

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18. The patriarch of the Buendía family, in Cien Años de Soledad, decided to write the names of the things and their usage, in order to combat the effects of the insomnia plague which was causing a devastating forgetfulness.

man who could change the course of rivers, the passing of time and even the climatic conditions, can not shape his own history. And this occurs because he is determined to eliminate the past, not only from his biography, but past events from the memory of his fellow countrymen as well, a fantasy which intends to make the past sterile and secure the stability of the existing order. For, as Marx explained,

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but in circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past"<sup>19</sup>.

Hence we realize that the Patriarca is unable to form any intelligible record of his life because of a series of falsifications of the past. He tries to mould his own identity based on fallacious premises, i.e., an invalid conception of the social, separated from the people, as if the dictator were not surrounded by social relations, being alone responsible for history. Ironically, this very man who has no historical consciousness complains of his people "without history", and of being forced to live

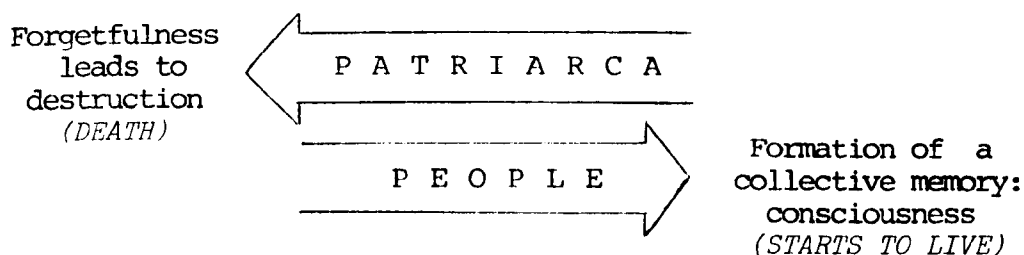
"en esta patria que no escogí por mi voluntad sino que me la dieron hecha como usted la ha visto que es como ha sido desde siempre con este sentimiento de irrealdad, con este olor a mierda, con esta gente sin historia que no cree en nada más que en la vida, ésta es la patria que me impusieron sin preguntarme" (OP, p.159, my emphasis).

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19. MARX, Karl. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, p.10.

### 3. The Awakening of the People

As I have already observed when Eliade's arguments were mentioned, memory and recollection are crucial elements for the domination of social space, including political relations. Having this in mind, we realize that two opposite processes are simultaneously described in the novel. The Patriarca, due to his persistent efforts to repress and forget the past, suffers a progressive erosion which leads to his final annihilation. The other process, running in a parallel line yet in the opposite direction, is the gradual formation of a collective memory. As soon as the people incorporate past events which result from their own action, an embryonic notion of culture is shaped and is, later on, transformed into the historical concepts of society and nation. Graphically, these opposed processes could be drawn as follows:



The voice (in the first person plural) that starts the narrative, is a definitive representation of the

people, who are learning to remember the past and to use it in the reconstruction of the present. As Ortega pointed out, "un pueblo sin historia escrita se reconstruye desde esta primera escena en la historia oral: es en su propio relato donde conoce, reconoce y discerne"<sup>20</sup>. By the end of the story, we realize that this voice is the union of several voices which can be heard throughout the novel, or the whole people who are telling and, concomitantly, making their own history. People who become conscious of their role in history because they recognize, at the end, that "nosotros sabíamos quiénes éramos" while the Patriarca "se quedó sin saberlo para siempre" (OP, p.271).

The same people who are submissive and terrorized at the beginning of the novel, who have to be completely sure about the Patriarca's death, referred to on the very first page, before they dare to enter in the palace where the dictator lies, are exultant in the end.

At the start of the novel people are afraid of celebrating the Patriarca's death because it had been announced once and he had "resuscitated" afterwards. Though the reader knows that this first death was, in fact, his double's, the people learn this fact only gradually, in a process of formation of a social consciousness which leads to the dictator's real death at the end.

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20. See ORTEGA, Julio, "El Otoño del Patriarca: texto y cultura", in: EARLE, Peter, op. cit., p.228.

The people, alienated in a society which represses historical truths, slowly develop their own identity, free of anti-historical ideological models, thus creating their autonomous way of collecting and interpreting facts. It is an appropriate metaphor, for example, that in the course of the novel there is repeated mention of the blind, cripples and lepers who wander around the palace. They represent the people who can not survive under oppressive regimes, living in a state of alienation and continuous decadence. However, at the end of the novel, the blind start to see, the cripples to walk and the lepers are cured:

"Y vimos a los ciegos encandilados por el fulgor de las rosas, vimos a los tullidos dando traspiés en las escaleras y vimos esta mi propia piel de recién nacido que voy mostrando por las ferias del mundo entero para que nadie se quede sin conocer la noticia del prodigio y esta fragancia de lirios prematuros de las cicatrices de mis llagas" (OP, p.251).

Although the rest of the people do not believe in the extraordinary transformations, described by an ex-leper, I think that they are quite significant. And their importance is increased because they have been placed at the end of the narrative, thus introducing the notion of a process of change. At the moment when the highest representative of the dictatorial regime is virtually blind and paralytic, deeply ill and covered by wounds, a deplorable state which anticipates his death; the people undergo an

inverse process, being able to see, to walk and to acquire the tender skin of a *recién nacido*. The symbolism of the newly-born denotes that the people are only born when they realize that the truth will triumph over the lies imposed on them for centuries. The Patriarca, who represents a system based on class exploitation, realizes that, to preserve his power, it is fundamental that the people continue dependent on him, a relation of subordination only maintained by terror. As the tyrant knows that "la gente tendrá más miedo cuanto menos entienda" (OP, p.245), he manages to repress the diffusion of knowledge.

Nevertheless, the action of the people gradually contradicts the existing order of values. Accustomed to accept the dictator's power unconditionally, following a passive role perpetuated through several generations as a perverse heritage, they begin to realize the absurdity of this situation<sup>21</sup>. At the start of the novel the people not only believe they are not capable of living without the Patriarca but also that the world only follows its course because he is alive. During the development of the novel, however, they become progressively conscious of their role in history. In an ever-expanding intensity, facts, opinions and actions are brought forward that gradually oppose the

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21. In spite of his long existence, the dictator remains a mystery for the people. This fact becomes explicit from the start of the novel: "Nuestros propios padres sabían quién era él porque se lo habían oído contar a los suyos, como estos a los suyos, y desde niños nos acostumbraron a creer que el estaba vivo en la casa del poder" (OP, p.8).

people to the Patriarca, to the point where the abyss between them is revealed.

The unlimited joy and happiness expressed by the people when they are finally convinced of the despot's death is a factor which reveals the writer's clear historical consciousness. In opposition to the blocked time of the "eternal" dictator, the people would now be allowed to live. After the Patriarca's death, they would finally be able to make their own history. At last, Miguel Pombo's ultimate sentence, "tyrants die but people are eternal"<sup>22</sup>, does have sense in the apparent reversal of values created by the book. Their roles were inverted, with a tyrant surviving "más de cinco generaciones" (OP, p.6), while exploiting an annihilated people. Yet, the dictator's death proves that tyrants are not eternal, so that the people could announce "la buena nueva que el tiempo incontable de la eternidad había por fin terminado" (OP, p.271). The sentence, which closes the narrative, seems to contain a paradox. Yet, though eternity is, by definition, endless time, this "time of eternity which comes to an end" may be interpreted as the end of a mythic time, embodied in the secular Patriarca.

In order to understand the mythic time it is

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22. Miguel Pombo participated in the first movement of independence in Colombia. This sentence was pronounced moments before his shooting by the Spaniards, who had surrendered Bogotá. See HENAO, J.M. and ARRUBLA, G. History of Colombia. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1938, p.202.



worth remembering Volkening's notes about Cien Años de Soledad. He demonstrates the existence of differences between historical time, which passes, and mythic time, which is circular, affirming that it is a characteristic of myth

"renovarse infinitas veces y volver, a periódicos intervalos, en un movimiento parecido al monótono fluir de una ola del mar que es siempre la misma aunque retorne millones de veces"<sup>23</sup>.

In this sense, as we have seen, the Patriarca, with his repeated deaths, after a life that seems to be a mere circle of repetition of events, represents the myth and his termination - the end of a mythic time. When the myth of the dictator's immortality and unconstrained power is finally destroyed, the people become free. This proves that history does not repeat itself, as would be preferred or advocated by those who keep the people exploited. Because, as Marx affirmed, commenting on Hegel's words, the latter

"remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce"<sup>24</sup>.

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23. VOLKENING, Ernesto, "Anotado al margen de Cien Años de Soledad", in: LAFFORGUE, Jorge (ed). Nueva Novela Latinoamericana. Buenos Aires, 1976, volume I, p.176.

24. MARX, Karl. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, op. cit., p. 10.

#### 4. History as a Circle in Carpentier

There is a passage in El Recurso del Método which is worth quoting as it illustrates very well the dictator's concept of history:

"La Historia, que era la suya puesto que en ella desempeñaba un papel, era historia que se repetía, se mordía la cola, se tragaba a sí misma, se inmovilizaba cada vez - poco importaba que las hojas de los calendarios ostentaran un 185(?), 189(?), 190(?), 190(6?)... - era un mismo desfile de uniformes y de levitas, de altas chisteras a la inglesa alternando con cascos enplumados a la boliviana, como ocurre en los teatros de poca figuración donde se hacen cortejos triunfales con treinta hombres que pasan y vuelven a pasar frente al mismo telón, corriendo cuando están detrás de él, para volver a entrar a tiempo en el escenario gritando, por quinta vez" (RM, p.128-9).

Continuing, Carpentier elaborates another analogy to exemplify further the Primer Magistrado's view of history as an endless circle from which it is impossible to escape. This circle leads nowhere as it is like

"el cuchillo clásico al que cambian el mango cuando está gastado, y cambian la hoja cuando a su vez se gasta, resultando que, al cabo de años, el cuchillo es el mismo - inmovilizado en el tiempo - aunque haya cambiado de mango y hoja tantas veces que ya resultan incontables sus mutaciones" (RM, p.129).

History is then grasped as if it were a magic or quintessential circle from within which the dictator attempts to escape. However, due to his lack of historical

consciousness which prevents him from seeing that this is a misleading idea, he seems to be locked inside the circle, with no possibility of abandoning it. This fatalist perspective of history as something determined *a priori*, as mentioned previously, is one of the chief characteristics of dictatorial regimes.

#### 4.1 Circular time in Derecho de Asilo

In a small book published in 1972, Carpentier clearly sets forth the notion of the circularity of time affecting underdeveloped countries plagued by authoritarian rulers. From the very beginning, Derecho de Asilo suggests that life is a circular process, an idea illustrated by the description of the awakening of the Secretary who gloomily observes that every morning the same gestures are demanded "hoy, como ayer, como hace veinte años"<sup>25</sup>. When he sees himself reflected in the mirror while shaving he notices that though he is getting older he continues repeating "el mismo gesto. La misma mueca[...] Esa barrera de gestos exigidos por la comunidad[...] entre el lecho y la calle"<sup>26</sup>. And continuing to meditate about his life, which could be a-historically epitomized as a mere circle of repetitions, he affirms:

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25. See CARPENTIER, Alejo. Derecho de Asilo, op. cit., p.15. The character is the Secretary of State, working for the government of a Latin American *república*. After a *coup-d'état* he hides for a time in the embassy of another Latin American country.

26. Ibid., p.15.

"Desde que el hombre nace, su existencia se acompaña de un reptar, de un deslizarse, de un tránsito en las fundas de innumerables tejidos, paños, telas, que han de quedar unidos por siempre en la historia de su existencia"<sup>27</sup>.

The Secretary tries to demonstrate the circularity of time through trivial facts, such as the clothes he is forced to wear every day. Man seems to him to be unable to struggle against the designs of time, to which he must submit. The attitudes man will adopt in each situation are predetermined by similar facts previously experienced. Because of his lack of historical consciousness, the Secretary thinks that

"Desde que abre los ojos hasta que los cierra - y aun después de cerrarlos - no hace el hombre más que desempeñar el papel de paraguas que tuviese varias fundas: fundas a las que, por lo demás, se atribuyen virtudes definidoras de condición, inteligencia y estado social"<sup>28</sup>.

In my opinion, the author wants to imply, in the course of the narrative, that the problems faced by a particular dictator remain quite similar to the problems experienced by any other dictator and are also identical to all previous dictatorial governments so that, in fact, there is no change of regime. New rulers eventually assemble all those typical features of the ones they substituted. Everything is eternally repeated and even - as the

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27. Ibid., p.15.

28. Ibid.

Secretary ponders when he observes the police repression of a student manifestation - the students being shot in the streets now are, as a collective entity, the *same* who studied with him, although they are of a *new* generation<sup>29</sup>.

Yet, I suppose that the section where the circular structure characterizing the myth is most evident is in the symbolism of Donald Duck, in the *Hermanos Gómez* shopwindow. The Secretary/Ambassador of Derecho de Asilo notices that the toy is constantly substituted by another which, paradoxically, is the same:

"Estaba ahí, en su humanidad de cartón piedra, de patas anaranjadas, en un ángulo de la vitrina, dominando un mundo de pequeños ferrocarriles en marcha, de alacenas con frutas de cera, pistolas vaqueras y carcajes, anda - deras son ábaco. Estaba ahí, aunque lo vendieron y reventaron, quince veces al día como los niños querían "ése", el de la vitrina, una mano femenina lo agarraba por sus patas anaranjadas, colocando después otro Pato Donald, el mismo, en su lugar. Esa perpetua sustitución de una forma por otra idéntica, inmóvil, alzada en el mismo pedestal, me hacía pensar en la eternidad"<sup>30</sup>.

The toy has a determined role which lasts a certain time establishing the infinite change of power in the shopwindow scene. Yet, nothing really changes, as all the rest remains exactly the same as ever. Equally, the President of the country described in the novel is replaced by General Mabillán who is not endowed with any new substantive

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29. Ibid., p.39.

30. Ibid., p.23-4 (my emphasis).

personal attributes. And the Secretary of the ex-ruler of the nation, exiled in the embassy of a neighbouring country, ends ironically by replacing the ambassador in his own country.

The perpetual substitution of Disney's Duck immediately brings forth the idea of eternity which is that of static time, as already discussed when I analysed the final parts in El Otoño del Patriarca. The temporal immobilization implied in the term "eternity" represents only an ideological elaboration, for it does not correspond to the idea of necessary movements and continuous transformations which is ultimately the main feature of dialectical logic.

#### *4.2 The circle of repetition in El Recurso del Método*

Returning to El Recurso del Método, we notice that this book also embodies the theory of the cycle of repetitions which leads to final destruction, as it is the dictator's death. Perhaps it does not occur to such an obsessive extent as in García Márquez, but I estimate that it appears with the same transparency, revealing the despot's preoccupation with the transient nature of time. The first paragraphs of the novel show that the Primer Magistrado thinks that time is indeed immutable, and such a view is reinforced throughout the narrative. It is my opinion, more-

over, that the structure of the novel - which coincidentally corresponds to the strategy used by the Colombian writer in El Otoño del Patriarca, with chapters of uninterrupted narrative, almost without separation in paragraphs - also serves to express the temporal immobility of a decaying system.

The dictator's astonishment in face of the circular time shown by the watches, reveals his warped worldview. It is not surprising, then, to notice that the very passage which starts the narrative (RM, p.11) is the same which closes the despot's life, thus completing the circle, at the end of the novel:

"Duermo. Me despierto. Hay veces, al despertar, que no sé si es de día, si es de noche. Un esfuerzo. A la derecha suena el tic-tac. Saber la hora. Seis y cuarto. Tal vez no. Acaso la siete y cuarto. Más cerca. Ocho y cuarto. Este despertador será un portento de relojería suíza, pero sus agujas son tan finas que apenas si se ven. Nueve y cuarto. Tampoco. Los espejuelos. Diez y cuarto. Eso, sí." (RM, p.337-8).

We observe, therefore, his concern with the passing of time in his pointless efforts to distinguish the hours or the days. When the point of departure is founded upon false premises, such as the notion that the circular time of clocks represents historical time, there is no way out other than final annihilation. The Primer Magistrado desperately tries to secure his historical prominence and the ensuing place in the history books. Nevertheless, he does

not know that his chance has already passed due to an irreparable cycle of repetitions and of a lack of solidarity with his people. Everything seems to him to repeat eternally but the unavoidable decadence, caused by this mere repetition, may be discerned in his physical decay:

"Floreceían los castaños, desflorecían los castaños, refloreceían los castaños, arrojando fechas al cesto de papeles, y tenía el sastre de Monsieur le President que regresar y regresar a la Rue de Tilsitt para remodelar sus paños sobre una anatomía desgastada que se esmirriaba de día en día" (RM, p.322).

When the ex-dictator feels that death is approaching he remembers the phrase cited in the pink paged Petit Larousse, which he must pronounce when the end comes, if he wants to figure in history or, at least, to have the illusion he will remain in history: *Acta est fabula* (RM, p. 338). This Latin expression could be translated either as "the story is told" or "the play has finished". That is, the Primer Magistrado believes, *après* Louis XV, that he is capable not only of modifying history, but also that after him nothing else will survive. Consequently, he thinks that his death represents the epilogue of humanity. At a first glance, it might seem that this is the real meaning the dictator wants to give to his words. He had falsely believed himself to be individually responsible for the construction of the history of the whole people. Added to this, he had also dogmatically accepted the phrase by Descartes, cited



by the Academician, early in the novel: "Los soberanos tienen el derecho de modificar en algo las costumbres" (RM, p.26). Considering all this, his last Latin words could convey, then, his belief that the course of events is detained at the moment he ceases to exist.

Nevertheless, if we observe with careful attention the development of the novel up to the point of the dictator's death, we notice the double meaning of the sentence *Acta est fabula*, which may be also translated as "the myth has finished". As previously demonstrated, the dictator believed in the circularity of facts which cause the perpetuation of the myth. That is, he represents the myth which will vanish with his disappearance. In this sense, it can be said that, after a life trapped by falsities, rooted in his lack of historical perspectives, the dictator has an intuition at the time of his death - "me percato de ello ahora" (RM, p.338), that time is not circular, mythical, as he had always thought. His stream of consciousness allows him to perceive that this idea is only evidence of the historical confusion he had lived in. As he was the greatest promoter of the myth, he understands that, with his death, it comes to an end. The people will triumph "over there", in his native land, and it is these people, now conscious of their role in the permanent struggle for social justice - and not himself - who will, in fact, make history.

## C H A P T E R    5

### HISTORY IN YO EL SUPREMO

"Roa Bastos se empeña en enseñarnos que nuestra conciencia de la historia, en el momento en que no hemos participado personalmente en ella o nuestra actuación histórica empieza a alejarse en el tiempo, reviste un carácter arbitrario, queda seducida por las infinitas posibilidades de la ficción"<sup>1</sup>.

My intention in this chapter is to analyse Augusto Roa Bastos' novel, Yo el Supremo, and in particular the historical outlook of its main character. First, I will subject this novel to the arguments put forward by Lukács in The Historical Novel. I will try to show that the theories of the Hungarian critic can not be totally applied to Roa Bastos' novel. A deeper analysis, however, will reveal that some concepts defended by Lukács - such as, for instance, the "representativity" of the people which the historical

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1. TURTON, Peter, op. cit., p.5.

character must present, and the connection between present and past the author must make clear in order to grasp history in its totality - may be applied to this novel.

Subsequently, I will compare the description of Francia found in Yo el Supremo to the one usually given by official historiography. I shall attempt to demonstrate Roa Bastos' capacity for maintaining a non-manichean position in relation to the dictator while he allows Francia to carry on his self-defence.

In the section dedicated to the study of the connection between past, present and future, I will comment on the importance of the author's dialectical worldview, indispensable in this kind of approach. Thereafter, I will investigate the dictator's *post mortem* status. This condition enables him to make incursions into the future and into the past, which will form the "necessary anachronisms" mentioned by Hegel and which are very frequent in the narrative.

To conclude, I will examine the character Correia da Câmara. He represents not only the link between the historical past and the present but also epitomizes everything El Supremo tried to prevent from happening in the future of his nation.

# 1. "The Historical Novel" and "Yo el Supremo"

Some of the ideas expressed by Lukács, when he

analyses the historical novel, can not be applied to Yo el Supremo. The most important one concerns the necessity of the use of the "medium" character - the popular and mediocre hero - to portray a certain period of the past; in place of the great historical personalities who marked the epoch.

A considerable part of The Historical Novel is dedicated to the analysis of Sir Walter Scott's novels. Notwithstanding this author's conservative philistinism, he produced remarkable work. Scott achieved this, Lukács stresses, because he always used historically anonymous characters - the "middle-of-the-road hero" - to represent the people. As central characters they provide a perfect instrument to present the totality of certain transitional stages of history. Lukács shows how Scott presented history in a realistic way, having the skill to embody the prevailing economic and social factors in common popular characters. Thus, the writer was capable of bringing a historical period to life through the account of the common life of the common citizen who had already absorbed all the characteristics of his time. And the critic emphasizes:

"The strength of Scott's writing lay precisely in this presentation of popular life, in the fact that the official big events and great historical figures were not given a central place"<sup>2</sup>.

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2. LUKÁCS, Georg. The Historical Novel. London, Merlin Press, 1978, p.56.

Still in Lukács' reasoning, the mediocre hero conforms more closely to the reality of the people, being, in consequence, a more accurate representative of the historical period, seen in its totality. After regarding Scott as the precursor of this type of composition of the historical novel, Lukács goes on to analyse several authors who utilized the historical genre. He shows how the greatness of the works lies in the authentic representation of the minute details peculiar to the life of the people of a certain epoch. Using the work of Tolstoy to illustrate his comments, Lukács affirms that

"those who despite the great events in the forefront of history, go on living their normal, private and egoistic lives are really furthering the true (unconscious, unknown) development, while the consciously acting "heroes" of history are ludicrous and harmful puppets"<sup>3</sup>.

Although some important personalities of British and French history may appear in the historical novels analysed by Lukács, they are only used as representatives of the movement which found their real source of energy in the people. As a result, the writers never present the evolution of these historical characters, but show them as complete personalities who will merely serve as background for the novelistic development. These characters, whom Lukács calls "world-historical individuals", should never be, there -

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3. Ibid., p.86 (my emphasis).

fore, the protagonists of the novel<sup>4</sup>. Considering, then, the position of the Hungarian critic, concerning the historical novel, we notice that it can not be applied to Roa Bastos' work. In Yo el Supremo we have a central character who perfectly fits Lukács' definition of "world-historical individual", i.e., a person who lived in a determined epoch and had a very important historical role. Besides, the narrative is filled with known and even famous episodes. Hence, Roa Bastos did not follow Lukács' counsel of making not only

"the protagonists of history minor figures - this corresponds to the inner laws of the historical novel -, but also in choosing wherever possible unknown and unattested episodes from the lives of these figures"<sup>5</sup>.

Would this fact have diminished the greatness of Yo el Supremo, as the thesis defended by Lukács suggests? In my opinion, it has not, in the least degree. Roa Bastos succeeded in joining the two perspectives in his central

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4. According to Lukács, these "world-historical individuals" are only valuable in the historical drama, but not in the novel. In fact, precisely because of the immediate character of the theatre, where reality must be grasped rapidly, there is a necessity of presenting history through its famous personalities. Due to the abbreviated form of presentation of reality in a play, if the central role is given to a "world-historical individual", it facilitates the characterization of a determined epoch. Yet, with the novel the opposite occurs, due to its greater proximity to real life. Even if, compared to reality, the time of the novel is also limited, in a theatre play time is much more concentrated and thus the famous historical characters give more strength to the representation (e.g., Shakespeare). In: LUKÁCS, op. cit., passim).

5. Ibid., p.168 (my emphasis).

character. Though El Supremo was an individual hero, who had a definite mission in a specific period of history, at the same time he attains the representation of the people, and acts on their behalf. This happens in a peculiar manner because Roa Bastos does not give up the exposition of the character's personal traits, inserted throughout the narrative. Yet, as Rama has already observed, everything flows naturally and this results from the use of several factors: the socio-historical does not blur the historiographical nor does it hinder the narrative<sup>6</sup>. Not even the other aspect necessary to the historical novel - which is in Lukács' opinion, the influence of the author's worldview - is missing. This means that Roa Bastos does project his point of view, i.e., his manner of grasping the contemporary world, so that the understanding of the past starts from the notion of the present.

As I have observed, the use of the "world-historical individual" as the protagonist of a historical novel may be associated with a kind of biography, where the smallest traits of his personality are disclosed and detailed. Lukács warns of the dangers of the biographical method which can either transform the historical character into a mere caricature or present him in an exaggerated way, where he is made to stand on tiptoe, while the great driving forces of history are inevitably omitted in the course of the

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6. RAMA, Angel, op. cit., p.25.

narrative<sup>7</sup>. If Yo el Supremo were analysed only on the basis of these premises, we observe that it would negate the theory developed in The Historical Novel. In spite of the fact that Roa Bastos' El Supremo did not become a caricature of a famous personality, as might be expected, the use of biographical data contributes to shed light upon a historical panorama which is infinitely wider than the merely personal. Added to this, we see that the author does not place Francia on a pedestal in order to show him as a great figure, but allows the reader to form his own opinion about him through a lucid narrative.

I will attempt to demonstrate, however, that though Roa Bastos' work is theoretically opposed to the ideas set forth by Lukács, it takes into account all these factors, resulting in a novel which concomitantly denies *and* fills the Lukácsian parameters. The Paraguayan writer reaches this surprising result by various stratagems. These elements of which will be examined in the course of this chapter. They are:

- I. the account of the historical character does not occur statically, viz., following only known facts about him, but there is a great amount of the author's personal creation;
- II. the official history is re-created as well. Consequently, though he uses a historical character and known events, they

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7. See the section "The biographical form and its problematic", in: LUKÁCS, Georg, op. cit., p.300 to 321.



are seen from a perspective radically opposed to the prevailing historical accounts about him;

III. as a result of the above, the history contained in the novel does not serve to perpetuate the current holders of power. What we see is a character who clearly represents his people;

IV. the "biography" does not impair the whole of the novel, because even though the book does not portray the "world - historical individual" only in significant moments but in a sort of daily routine, any triviality that could result from this procedure is banished from the text;

V. there is a clear connection between past, present and future: the historical character is focused on from the perspective of the present by the "writer son of his age", according to Lukács' definition<sup>8</sup>.

In this context, we can analyse Lukács' criticism of Maurois, whose preface to Shelley's biography he quotes, after qualifying the book as a *pot-pourri* of novel and history which is neither one nor the other. Maurois writes:

"The aim of this book has been to produce a novelist's work rather than a critic's. Of course the facts are true and not a phrase or thought has been attributed to Shelley which are not to be found in the memories of his friends, in the letters and in his poems, but we have tried to order these true elements so as to give the impression of progressive discovery, natural growth, which seems to be the proper sphere of the novel"<sup>9</sup>.

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8. Ibid., p.254.

9. Ibid., p.253 (my emphasis).

Next, Lukács affirms that "this combination of sticking to the facts and dressing them up in *belles lettres* is rooted in the writer's divorce from popular life"<sup>10</sup>. Why does Yo el Supremo - which ends with the *nota final del compilador* asserting something very similar to this<sup>11</sup> - have the opposite effect from this "divorce from popular life", suggested by Lukács?

The answer to this can be found in history itself, since Roa Bastos tries to reconstruct an epoch of the past - and not only a character - from the point of view of the present and, particularly, of the people. To achieve this he uses the existing historiography but at the same time he reinterprets facts presented in a biased way by most of the historians who wrote about El Supremo. And in this sense Bareiro-Saguier rightly emphasizes the great interest of the novel as a historical theme, in the sense intended by Lukács: it takes history as subject at the same time in which it is subordinated to history,

"Pues no se trata de una pasiva descripción, sino de la transformación activa de una materia histórica, que no solamente aclara y amplifica el momento del desarrollo anedóctico, sino que se conecta con el tiempo real,  
(p.t.o.)

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10. Ibid., p.254.

11. The compiler says, among other things, that

"En lugar de decir y escribir cosa nueva, no ha hecho más que copiar fielmente lo ya dicho y compuesto por otros. No hay pues en la compilación una sola página, una sola frase, una sola palabra, desde el título hasta la nota final que no haya sido escrita de esa manera" (YES, p.467).

constituido por el pasado, es cierto, pero también por el presente. Esta característica es esencial para comprender una obra como Yo el Supremo, que no se alimenta de las nostalgias escapistas de un pasado muerto sino que se proyecta pujante hacia el presente"<sup>12</sup>.

Accordingly, we notice that Roa Bastos made use of episodes and details which are biographically authentic, but which were modified by the perspective of the author. That means that Francia is portrayed as a true representative of the popular classes and not depicted as the ruler of a "kingdom of terror". The ruling classes liked to see him in this way and later historians, intentionally or naively, have taken a similar view.

## 2. Re-creating history

Rama stresses three levels which have been mingled in the production of Yo el Supremo: a. the gathering of historical material; b. the writing activity of José Gaspar de Francia and c. the writing of a novel by the author, characterized as the "compilation" of a global text from the sum of fragments<sup>13</sup>.

Although it might seem that the first level is of greatest interest when the study of historical aspects is proposed, we will see that the two other levels are also

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12. BAREIRO SAGUIER, Rubén, "La historia y las historias en Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos", op. cit., p.28.

13. RAMA, Angel, op. cit., p.36.

very important because Yo el Supremo not only re-creates a historical time but also revives an individual forgotten by history. El Supremo is the victim of one of the most crying cases of injustice done by history. Much has been said about the dictator based on documents produced by his political enemies, namely, some of the big landowners whose land he expropriated and who certainly presented a distorted image of him.

## 2.1 *Historicism versus historical materialism*<sup>14</sup>

After reading several texts on the history of Paraguay, I have established a careful comparison of history and fiction. I noticed, for instance, that the novelist utilized texts by different historians quite freely, in order to proceed with the account of history in his novel. Nevertheless, I do not intend to draw a minute parallel proving the author's use of this or that history book, which could be corroborated without much difficulty. My intention is to demonstrate how to the historiography, i.e., the description of the facts *per se*, was added Augusto Roa Bastos' dialectical worldview. Therefore, it may be seen that though he was

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14. "El objetivo de la historia no es 'hacer revivir el pasado', sino comprenderlo. Para esto hay que desconfiar de los documentos brutos, de las supuestas experiencias vividas, de los juicios probables, y relativos. Para hacer un trabajo de historiador no basta con hacer revivir una realidad política, sino que debe someterse un momento y una sociedad a un análisis de tipo científico". In: VILAR, Pierre. Iniciación al Vocabulario del Análisis Histórico. Barcelona, Editorial Crítica (Grijalbo), 1981, p.22.

"making fiction", he also surpassed the capacity of "making history". This happens because history appears in a global perspective and not only as an account of facts which can only provide a partial view of reality.

My purpose, here, is not to make a criticism of historicism, but only to emphasize the experience of the conjunction of past and present, used so well by the author of Yo el Supremo. Because, as Benjamim explained,

"a historical materialist can not do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the eternal image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past"<sup>15</sup>.

For Roa Bastos, the necessity of understanding history as a "continuum" connecting past, present and future is quite clear. It does not seem to me possible, therefore, to accept completely the final confessions by the compiler, already cited in this chapter<sup>16</sup>. The facts described in Roa Bastos' novel are the same as those of historical books, but they certainly are analysed from a different perspective.

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15. See BENJAMIN, Walter, "Theses on the philosophy of history", in his Illuminations. Glasgow, Fontana/Collings, 1979, p.264. Considering here the notion of "eternity" defined in Chapter 4 as the static time where progress is non-existent, we see once more that El Supremo's worldview is very lucid when he affirms: "Apuesto mi última muela contra la pala del sepulterero a que la eternidad no existe" (YES, p.247).

16. See note 11, p.254.

## 2.2 *The inconsistencies of official history*

Although most critics are very cautious about accepting what an author says about his work<sup>17</sup>, I consider Roa Bastos' words about Yo el Supremo to be very useful for a thorough understanding of the novel. Concerning his use of history in fiction, he speaks against the incoherences of official history:

"La base de mon project narratif a consisté par conséquent à assumer jusqu'au bout ma rébellion contre cette farce qui occultait et occulte encore l'histoire vécue. Mon point de départ était cette histoire-là (impossible à reconstituer dans sa trame véritable). Mais je ne prétendais pas faire un roman historique ni une biographie romancée, produits hybrides qui simulent une fausse vraisemblance. Mon "project" de roman a donc consisté dans un premier temps, à écrire une contre-histoire, une réplique subversive et transgressive à l'historiographie officielle. Tandis que je compilais le texte, je ressentais toujours plus fortement que je devais utiliser cette rébellion contre l'histoire vue par les historiens, et que tel serait l'axe opératif du texte"<sup>18</sup>.

One of the great merits of Roa Bastos' work is that it does not present history as it is usually seen: an unquestionable truth. It reveals, on the other hand, that historical accounts, sometimes seen almost as dogmas, are, in many cases, simple ideological manifestations. The facts are

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17. Concerning Roa Bastos and Yo el Supremo see, for example, the opinion of Noé Jitrik in LEENHARDT, Jacques (ed). Littérature Latino Américaine D'Aujourd'hui. Paris, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1980, p.163.

18. ROA BASTOS, Augusto, "Réflexion auto-critique a propos de Moi le Suprême due point de vue socio-linguistique et ideologique. Condition du narrateur", in: LEENHARDT, Jacques, op. cit., p.141-2.

distorted and diffused among the people to serve in the interests of the dominant classes. As happened in Macondo, the fictional town of Cien Años de Soledad, the account of the massacre of the Banana Company workers presented by the author is opposed to the "official version". Although the reader is informed about the tragic slaughter of thousands of workers, García Márquez's novel later reports the incongruity of the holders of power, whose official accounts of the event vary from how the strikers peacefully scattered, to the preposterous version of the school textbooks, asserting that the Banana Company had never existed<sup>19</sup>.

In the subsequent sections, I will investigate how Roa Bastós presents his "counter-history" of Paraguay, which also refutes the "official version" of the history books.

### *2.3 The official historians: the preponderant role of "Julio Cesar"*

In several passages of Yo el Supremo there are quotations of texts written by historians whose names either appear in full or partially or do not appear at all, though their works are used. In order to illustrate this aspect, I will only mention the texts on page 207 where, near to Justo Pastor Benítez and Thomas Carlyle, there is the citation

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19. See Cien Años de Soledad, op. cit., p.269.

of "Julio Cesar". Perhaps this is due to the greater relevance of the latter in the elaboration of the novel, which results, perhaps, from his contemporaneity with the novelist. This reference to "Julio Cesar", and even the "compiler's" veiled thanks to him, appears very frequently. There is not any bibliographic data for it would not be expected within the fictional genre. Yet, the author cunningly mentions an "op.cit." (YES, p.266), when this did not occur *strictu sensu* in the novel. We know, however, that the author is referring to the historian Júlio César Chaves, whose biography El Supremo Dictador: José Gaspar de Francia<sup>20</sup> was much utilized in the novel as one of the writer's main sources of information.

Nevertheless, Chaves' book, though of much use for the elaboration of the novel, differs largely from it as regards the worldview of the two authors. Notwithstanding the historian's serious and exhaustive research and his attempts to remain "neutral" in his exposition of Gaspar de Francia's life, by avoiding value judgements about his government, he let several words or even sentences flow, which disclose his clear preference for the wealthy people who were persecuted by El Supremo. In my opinion, Chaves does not consider important what Francia did for the oppressed classes, a fact that underpins the self-defence of El Supremo in Roa Bastos' novel. On the other hand, he always mentions the fact

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20. CHAVES, Júlio César, op. cit.



that the dictator has injured the rich to favour the poor. In Chapter XXI (*La Conjuración*), for instance, Chaves writes about something that even El Supremo recognizes at the end of the novel. When Francia persecuted and destroyed his enemies, annihilating their participation in the government's decisions, he assumed personally all facets of his power without allowing the formation of "verdaderos dirigentes revolucionarios" (YES, p.464) who could carry on his work. But if Roa Bastos conjectures about the chaotic situation which the people had to face after Francia's death, Chaves, in his turn, worries about the situation of the upper class. After describing the general discontent among the *hombres cultos e inteligentes, poseedores de brillantes apellidos*, which caused the 1820 conspiracy, Chaves emphasizes:

"Todo por la obra de un solo hombre cuyos halagos no se dirigían sino a las clases inferiores, a la chusma. El descontento era general, y aunque en forma sorda, no perdía oportunidad de manifestarse"<sup>21</sup>.

It may be seen that, although the lower classes totalled more than ninety per cent of the population, they did not count for the historian.

Roa Bastos' answer to this and other criticisms by historians, biographers and opposers of the Paraguayan dictator, can be found in the explanatory passage containing Francia's self-defence, after the lampoon is found at the

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21. Ibid., p.272 (my emphasis).

cathedral door:

"Entré a gobernar un país donde los infortunados no conta ban para nada, donde los bribones lo eran todo. Cuando empuñé el poder Supremo en 1814, a los que me aconsejaron con primeras o segundas intenciones que me apoyara en las clases altas, dije: Señores, por ahora pocas gracias. En la situación en que se encuentra el país, en que me en -  
cuentro yo mismo, mi única nobleza es la chusma" (YES, p.45).

Roa Bastos continues, through El Supremo's voice, to speak about the justice and social equality proposed by the latter, who defends himself from those who

"No quisieron comprender que hay ciertas situaciones desgraciadas en que no se puede conservar la libertad sino a costa de los más. Situaciones en las que el ciudadano no puede ser enteramente libre sin que el esclavo sea sumamente esclavo. Se negaron a aceptar que toda verdadera Revolución es un cambio de bienes. De leyes. Cambio a fondo de toda sociedad" (YES, p.45).

Going further on the same subject, the dictator writes in his private notebook:

"Redacté leyes iguales para el pobre, para el rico. Las hice contemplar sin contemplaciones. Para establecer leyes justas suspendí leyes injustas. Para crear el Derecho suspendí los derechos que en tres siglos han funcionado invariablemente torcidos en estas colonias. Liquidé la impropiedad de la propiedad individual tornándola en propiedad colectiva, que es lo propio" (YES, p.46).

And to those who doubt his capacity to establish equality between rich and poor, such as D. Pedro Alcántara de

Somellera<sup>22</sup>, he stresses that

"Precisamente porque la fuerza de las cosas tiende sin cesar a destruir la igualdad, la fuerza de la Revolución debe siempre tender a mantenerla: Que ninguno sea lo bastante rico para comprar a otro, y ninguno lo bastante pobre para verse obligado a venderse" (YES, p.44).

Considering the above quotations of Yo El Supremo, which explicitly reveal Francia's concern with the destiny of the poor, we realize the fundamental difference existing between Roa Bastos' viewpoint and the other historians, represented by Chaves.

Yet, as Rama has observed, perhaps Roa Bastos unconsciously yields to the temptation of interpreting Francia's time according to a socialist doctrine only later formulated and which, for a very long time, could not be applied to the Latin American economic situation<sup>23</sup>. However, in my opinion, Roa Bastos' interpretation does not impair the historical re-creation, nor prevents the character from being re-elaborated in an expressive and authentic manner. I think, moreover, that the author's worldview, clearly based on the postulations of historical materialism, gives another and more complete dimension to the understanding of the historical character.

Accordingly, Roa Bastos defends his character from attacks and detractions he suffered during a very long

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22. Pedro Somellera wrote the foreword to Rengger's essay on the revolution of Paraguay, which shows that he certainly shares the Swiss physicians' view on Francia, already analysed.

23. RAMA, Angel, op. cit., p.34.

period. If Chaves presents El Supremo in a way that does not lie far from reality, drawing an image that is only harmed by his bourgeois worldview, this is not the case of many "historians" who have preceded him and produced distorted accounts which have perpetuated a false image of the dictator<sup>24</sup>.

#### 2.4 The Swiss physicians, Rengger and Longchamp

The Swiss physicians, John Rengger and Marcel Longchamp, are very intimate friends with Francia, and even qualify his government as "el más generoso y magnánimo que existe sobre la tierra civilizada" (YES, p.129). Yet, they change this opinion radically when they are expelled from Paraguay after their links with the *doradas veinte familias*, which oppose the dictator, become manifest.

El Supremo defends himself from their attacks

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24. Francia has been generally treated with great injustice by historians, and also by those who had an interest in distorting his image, namely, the big landowners he had expropriated. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that distinguished left-wing intellectuals such as Pablo Neruda and José Martí, also had a gloomy idea about El Supremo. In Canto General, Neruda mentions Francia as

"rey leproso, rodeado  
por la extensión de los verbales[...]  
[who] cerró al Paraguay como un nido  
de su majestad, amarró  
tortura y barro a las fronteras"

(See NERUDA, Pablo. Canto General. Ayacucho, Venezuela, 1976, p.139). Carlos Rafael Rodríguez's essay, "José Martí, contemporáneo y compañero" (in: Revista de la Universidad de la Habana, Havana, number 196/197, 1972, p.6), demonstrates how José Martí mistakenly led by *a priori* judgements about José Gaspar de Francia, could not see him as he was in fact, speaking about *el Paraguay lúgubre de Francia*.

by underlying their falsehood. The novel, in fact, describes the passage when Francia talks with the Swiss doctors. At this moment, El Supremo knows facts that came to happen only later - e.g., the book they wrote about the epoch - and is able to introduce these future elements into the dialogue. The dictator is emphatic, saying that

"Ustedes son los que han asesinado con sus mortales póci mas a la mitad de los soldados de mi ejército.¿No lo han confesado ustedes mismos en el libelo que fabularan y publicaran dos años después que yo los expulsé de aquí?" (YES, p.126).

In the subsequent pages, El Supremo analyses what the physicians have written about the Paraguayan government in Ensayo Histórico sobre la Revolución del Paraguay, the first account of Francia's dictatorship. As their essay is, according to the compiler's note, "el clásico por excelencia acerca de este período histórico de la vida paraguaya: llave y linterna indispensables para penetrar en la misteriosa realidad de una época sin paragón en el mundo americano" (YES, p.126) the author's non-manichean position becomes evident: while Roa Bastos (the "compiler") defines it, probably ironically, as the classical book which enlightens a historical period, his character, El Supremo, is outraged with the calumnies which sometimes make up history, stating menacingly:

"De estas escorias se nutren las historias, la novela - rías de toda especie, que escriben los tordos-escribas tardíamente. Papeles manchados de infamias mal digeridas" (YES, p.129).

There follows a long quotation from Rengger's essay describing the horrors of the prisons and dungeons, with particular attention to the helpless misery and enormous sufferings of the prisoners piled up in the dark cells at the Tevegó State Prison. In my opinion, the self-defence formulated by El Supremo undermines the impact of Rengger's text, by exhibiting not an impartial view but, as I have already mentioned, the author's non-manichean point of view. While the reader, faced with the development of the text and his knowledge of the connection between the doctors and the aristocratic Paraguayan élite will draw his own conclusion about the episode, probably tending to view what the Swiss men wrote really as calumnies, the author withdraws from any value judgement about the quality of El Supremo's government.

#### 2.5 Mitre, the "*Tácito del Plata*"

On defending himself against the false information about his government, El Supremo strikes back against those of Bartolomé Mitre, whom he calls *Tácito del Plata*. Mitre, who governed Argentina during the Triple Alliance War

(1864-1870), is greatly despised by El Supremo. This is due to the fact that he was one of the authors of the secret agreement between Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay (under the "protection" of the British Empire), resulting in the "Triple Alliance" which destroyed Paraguay in a coward war. But this scorn is also due to Mitre's biased interpretation<sup>25</sup> of this and other facts such as, for instance, the historical events leading to the independence of Paraguay. Mitre could be put on the list of the official historians I have previously referred to, who distorted the facts, by presenting them to suit their own convenience. Through Francia's voice, Roa Bastos recriminates against the Argentinian ruler:

"Tozudamente insistes, golpeando la contera del bastón-generalísimo sobre las baldosas flojas de la Historia; porfías en que Belgrano fue el verdadero autor de la Revolución del Paraguay, arrojada como una tea al campamento paraguayo" (YES, p.119).

The "loose bricks of history", in my viewpoint, represent the difficulties of the written word in recording the facts as they actually occurred. The version presented by Roa Bastos is radically opposed to the one formulated by Mitre. Again, in the private notebook, placed between two

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25. As Benjamim has already stressed when he questioned "with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all the rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers" (BENJAMIN, Walter, op. cit., p. 258).

*circulares-perpetuas*, there is Francia's apparent conversation with Mitre:

"Yo puedo ser todavía algo más benigno contigo, pues eres un muchacho mientras escribo esto" (YES, p.120).

The criticism appears through El Supremo's knowledge of the future and, curiously, even of the future's future<sup>26</sup>, when he not only mentions Mitre but also a future critic of him:

"Eres de los que creen, dirá después de ti un hombre honrado que cuando encuentran una metáfora creen que han encontrado una verdad" (YES, p.119, my emphasis).

Thus, the author criticizes the historian's language, which serves to propagate falsities, whose "disser-taciones históricas sobre la Revolución son titilimundis, no discursos (Ibid.). Nevertheless, an unquestionable factor is opposed to Mitre's fallacious interpretation, i.e., history's capacity to elucidate facts falsified by the *falsos escribas* mentioned by Francia. Therefore, it is

"forzoso escribirlo todo para comunicarse, y de este modo llega un día en que la posteridad se halla en posesión hasta de los más recónditos pensamientos de los hombres del pasado y puede estudiarlo mejor que teniendo los a la vista" (YES, p.119).

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26. It will be examined later, in the section concerning the relation between past, present and future.



The dictator still criticizes the *Tácito del Plata* for having been an agent of British imperialism, who, "amparado en la tutela colonial inglesa" (YES, p.229), created conditions for the extermination of the more progressive and fair American republic of the epoch. If it had not been destroyed, and the conditions for the continuation of Gaspar de Francia's work had been preserved, the example of Paraguay might have modified the history of the continent. Nevertheless, the Triple Alliance's leaders, headed by Mitre, can not see this because they have "el chambergo inglés echado sobre los ojos" (YES, p.120). Consequently, their attitude of complete subordination in the face of the determination of the British metropolis frustrate El Supremo's dream of strengthening ties with the neighbouring countries,

"no sólo para conservar una recíproca amistad, buena armonía, libre comercio y correspondencia, sino también para fundar una sociedad basada en principios de justicia, de equidad y de igualdad, como una verdadera confederación de Estados autónomos y soberanos" (YES, p.209).

## 2.6 The Robertson brothers, creators of the "kingdom of terror"<sup>27</sup>

The Scottish brothers, Robert and John Parish

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27. For a succinct comment about the Robertson brothers in Yo el Supremo, see *N.del C.* in the pages 138 and 139.

Robertson also lived in Paraguay at the time of Francia's government and, among those who reported their experiences there, they were the most aggressive and unscrupulous "historians". Again, Roa Bastos collates their opinion with Francia's. The reader may find, thus, from page 139 onwards, the description of the *hombres verdes, de cabellos rojos*. Their opinions are set against El Supremo's report about them. The dictator probably did not have the opportunity of reading their book about the Kingdom of Terror, published around 1838 or 1839, shortly before his death. Yet, through the magic that fiction may provide, El Supremo already knows the book written by the British merchants (as he calls them) and can introduce this knowledge into their dialogue.

The difference between El Supremo's and the Robertson's version of some facts is surprising. One example of this is the account of D. Juana's passion for John Parish, she aged 84 and he only 20. This is the moment when Roa Bastos inserts old legends about sorcery, making El Supremo have great fun in frightening the young men with them. There is a great contrast between the two reports, even in the language: Robertson's is very serious, El Supremo's is jovial. However, notwithstanding El Supremo's playful tone and the legends he tells, he ultimately leaves the episode with more credit than the Scotsman. Because John Parish is not taken seriously when he affirms that he left Juana Esquivel's home, where he was living as a guest, after he discovered

her love for him. The dictator's version becomes even more creditable when the reader confronts Robertson's words with El Supremo's account of the lovers' encounters which made "hervir el arroyo cuando ambos se arrojaban desnudos a sus aguas" (YES, p.150), and also how the old woman had "recompensado otorgándole extremada suerte en la cacería de doblones, si no de pichones" (Ibid.). That is, the rich lady was paying Robertson to have the love affair and he was happy in his role.

Therefore, from this minor account Roa Bastos reveals that the subjects of the British Queen are not trustworthy. The mentioned excerpt serves, then, to introduce the commentary about the relations between the Robertsons and El Supremo and to question their authority to write about Paraguay. One of the compiler's notes leads the reader to the conclusion that the Robertsons' books are not trustworthy since they took a very long time to appear, being rewritten after the loss of the originals. Besides, the compiler also mentions that the "letters" are apocryphal, since the Robertsons had assumed the authorship of many texts about El Supremo which were written by different authors of the River Plate.

In the episode in which John Parish Robertson is named commercial representative of Paraguay in England, he explains that the nomination was an imposition of El Supremo, completely against his will, but to which he had to

agree because "el Supremo no admite que se le contradiga" (YES, p.329). Meanwhile, Francia explains the nomination as a thing that the Scot had earnestly requested and was longing for, and how he "se deshizo en alabanzas y agradecimientos" (YES, p.331) when he achieved it. This explanation does not go with the confusion and surprise that Robertson affirms to have felt when he was informed of his mission. His excuse for accepting it was that

"Rehusar la quijotesca misión era provocar inmediatamente la ruina sobre mi desdichada cabeza y la de mi pobre hermano; si es que no las perdíamos antes bajo la cuchilla del verdugo" (YES, p.330).

In my opinion, El Supremo's statement is, again, more powerful here. Yet, this is the reader's judgement since the author allows the direct confrontation of the two testimonies.

Robertson's position is impaired not only because the text conveys the fact that he desires eagerly, for himself, the sample commodities El Supremo would send to England, but also because he wanted to leave Paraguay. Francia, on the other hand, only wanted England to recognize Paraguayan independence before a commercial link was established between the two countries.

Nevertheless, Roa Bastos reaffirms his non - manichean position in this episode. Though El Supremo mentions that the Robertsons' writings were produced by "ciegos, sordos

y mudos [who] no entienden que no pueden transcribir sino el ruido de sus resentimientos y olvidos" (YES, p.326) and the reader, consequently, tends to believe more in the former, the author uses a device to make possible an immediate confrontation of the accusations made by the Robertsons with an arbitrary attitude of the dictator. That is, in the novel, Francia mixes the Robertsons' travel to Argentina with José Tomás Isasi's trip *de sondeo* to the same country. Yet, the author explains in a compiler's note (YES, p.332) that, in fact, Isasi did not go with Robertson but only ten years later, with the group accompanying Rengger and Long - champ.

Through this detail the reader becomes aware of what happened with Isasi or, better, with those who were victimized in his place. The Paraguayan Isasi had been granted leave to go to Argentina with his family, apparently because of his daughter's health problems. The girl was the god-daughter and favourite of El Supremo. Yet, Isasi does not return to Paraguay, betraying his friend and embezzling the large amount of money he was carrying in order to buy gunpowder for the Paraguayan government. As a consequence, El Supremo determines that Isasi's shop assistant who remained in Paraguay, will suffer the death penalty instead of his exiled boss. And from then on, every passing year, on the day of Isasi's escape, a hostage is executed in a sort of ritual that punishes the defendant

*in absentia*. The victims, however, do not appease the dictator's wrath (YES, p.333). The mention of this absurd vengeance of El Supremo discloses his violent and arbitrary character. It was made in the compiler's note which supposedly reveals Roa Bastos opinion [he is the "compiler"] and discloses, then, the author's non-manichean position. That is, if, before, the author presented the Robertsons' falsity as compared to El Supremo's honesty, he now also shows an evil facet of the dictator's behaviour. Yet, two mentions inserted in the same *N. del C.* attenuate El Supremo's behaviour because they subtly disclose that the text about the vengeance against Isasi was excerpted from Rengger and Longchamp's writings. And, as already shown, the opposition of the two Swissmen to the dictator, the result of their alliance with the upper class, could be the cause of a libellous report on him.

### *2.7 Carlyle's position*

Another Scotsman, Thomas Carlyle, was one of the rare exceptions who, at that time, took a favourable position in relation to El Supremo. His works, particularly the one entitled Dr. Francia, are sympathetic to El Supremo and, perhaps for this very reason, relegated to oblivion. Carlyle saw in

"el Supremo del Paraguay al hombre más notable de esta parte de América. Despedía una luz muy sulfurosa y sombría que brillaba en su espíritu - afirma el cultor de los Héroes -, pero con ella iluminó el Paraguay lo mejor que pudo" (YES, p.327).

However, this perspective is criticized by Lukács who denounces writers "prompted by a feeling of romantically decorative hero-worship *à la* Carlyle"<sup>28</sup>. For this reason, Roa Bastos' dialectical perspective can not be compared to the romantic view of Carlyle. The view of a writer who, like this Scotsman, was criticized by Marx for having sunk to the position of apologist for capitalism in decline, after the 1848 Revolution<sup>29</sup>, can not be paralleled with the Marxist worldvision of the Paraguayan writer.

### 3. The Memory<sup>30</sup> and the facts

Throughout the novel, the author criticizes those who only grasp facts chronologically, considering their connection with the past as a mere succession of events. The memory of the past is fundamental for the perfect understanding of history. However, this memory is not that of the "cucaracha de archivo" or "del loro limpiándose siempre el

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28. LUKÁCS, Georg, op. cit., p.38.

29. Cited in LUKÁCS, Georg, op. cit., p. 30.

30. An analysis of the importance of memory in the formation of historical consciousness was made in Chapter 4.

pico del mismo lado" (YES, p.9), i.e., the memory that only remembers facts mechanically and by repetition, without the concern with investigating whether they are reported truth - fully or are just "nuevos errores" (Ibid.). Memory is, necessarily,

"la memoria-sentido, memoria-juicio dueña de una robusta imaginación capaz de engendrar por sí misma los acontecimientos.[since] Los hechos sucedidos cambian continuamente. El hombre de buena memoria no recuerda nada porque no olvida nada" (YES, p.11).

Accordingly, the books starts with a violent accusation against the "memoriones" (YES, p.10) who suffer from "desmemoria" (YES, p.14). They represent, at an immediate level, the members of the élite who opposed Francia's government and supposedly were responsible for the lampoon placed at the cathedral's door, announcing the death of the dictator at the outset of the novel. And, on a wider perspective, they are all those historians who are only concerned with the immediacy of the facts; those who "emplean su memoria en el daño ajeno, mas no saben hacerlo ni siquiera en el propio bien" (YES, p.11).

El Supremo questions incisively:

" De qué memoria no han de necesitar para acordarse de tantas patrañas como han forjado con el único fin de difamarme, de calumniar al Gobierno?" (YES, p.9.10).



From this moment onwards, Francia will remember, though not in a chronologically perfect line, events of his life and government, mixing history and fiction dialectically. As El Supremo is concurrently a historical and fictional character, he can allow himself the

"lujo de mezclar los hechos sin confundirlos. Ahorro tiempo, papel, tinta, fastidio de andar consultando almanaques, calendarios, polvorientos anaquelarios. Yo no escribo la historia. La hago. Puedo rehacerla según mi voluntad, ajustando, reforzando, enriqueciendo su sentido y verdad. En la historia escrita por publicanos y fariseos, éstos invierten sus embustes a interés compuesto. Las fechas para ellos son sagradas. Sobre todo cuando son erróneas. Para estos roedores, el error es precisamente roer lo cierto del documento" (YES, p.210-211).

I view the above words as extremely important for the understanding of Yo el Supremo. Through them we realize that the novel's development, which concerns not only the period of Francia's government but encapsulates the whole history of Paraguay, is not organized according to the chronology because dates, actually, do not matter.

More important than this is to see the facts, not as a mere succession of events that lead nowhere, but to examine them profoundly and dialectically, using them as tools which will help to grasp reality. For, as El Supremo explains:

"Lo que es enteramente visible nunca es visto enteramente. Siempre ofrece alguna otra cosa que exige aún ser mirada. Nunca se llega al fin" (YES, p.214).

These words can be considered, perhaps, a common place, but they clearly show the writer's thought about those who only remain on the surface considering only the visible point of the "iceberg" as the whole fact<sup>31</sup>.

Considering his novel and its relation with history, Roa Bastos has affirmed in a Peruvian newspaper that

"Yo creo que la manera de leer la Historia exige una serie de exploraciones nuevas a cada lectura[...] Creo que la Historia está compuesta de procesos y lo que importa en ellos son las estructuras significativas: para encontrarlas hay que ir contra la Historia misma. Eso es lo que he intentado hacer y es lo que más me costó en la elaboración del texto: este duelo, un poco a muerte, con las constancias documentales, para que sin destruir o anular del todo los referentes históricos, pudiera, si, limpiarlos de las adherencias que van acumulando sobre ellos las crónicas, a veces hechas con buena voluntad pero con mucha ceguera"<sup>32</sup>.

We perceive, hence, that the image of the dictator

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31. This is the definition of "fact" given by the journalist Bill in the novel O Senhor Embaixador, by Érico Veríssimo, which has many similar points with the novels on dictators studied in this thesis:

"Isso a que chamamos de 'fato' não será uma espécie de iceberg, quero dizer, uma coisa cuja parte visível corresponde apenas a um décimo de seu todo? Porque a parte invisível do 'fato' está submersa nas águas de um torvo oceano de interesses políticos e econômicos, egoísmos e apetites nacionais e internacionais" (VERÍSSIMO, Érico. O Senhor Embaixador. Porto Alegre, Globo, 1964, p.4).

32. "Escarbando a un dictador: Yo el Supremo", in: La Prensa, Lima, 4th February, 1975 (apud Benedetti, Mario, op. cit., p.26).

in the novel is copied from history, but this history is, as defined by Miliani, seen and re-elaborated by the dictator, who is the subject and the object of the narrative. The critic explains that there is not an absolute linear progression in this novel but a narrative re-organization of the historic events in a fictional mode<sup>33</sup>. And in order to render possible the review of facts done by El Supremo, the author invests him with a power not merely political, as analysed in the first part of this thesis, but also fictional, which also enables him to change things according to his own whim. And the dictator understands his role very well when he affirms, in his private notebook:

"Yo soy el árbitro. Puedo decidir la cosa. Fragar los hechos. Inventar los acontecimientos. Podría evitar guerras, invasiones, pillajes, devastaciones" (YES, p. 213).

Notwithstanding, the work of "cleaning away the accretions which accumulate in the chronicles", carried out by Roa Bastos, results in a serious analysis of the history of Paraguay, a disclosure of past events from independence to the present day. This analysis can be found in the *Circular Perpetua* which El Supremo dictates to his scribe Patiño, with the purpose of clarifying aspects of the history of Paraguay unknown to the majority of the popula -

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33. See MILIANI, Domingo, "El dictador: objeto narrativo en Yo el Supremo", in: Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana, Lima, number 4, 2nd Semester, 1976, p.119.

tion. Thus, in spite of being an arbiter who could forge facts to suit his convenience, what we see is a man concerned with bringing to light the truth about the history of his country.

#### 4. The Relation Between Past, Present and Future

Roa Bastos' work is based, then, on concrete historical material which is temporally and geographically well delimited. For this reason, the relation between past, present and future becomes even clearer than in the other books analysed in this thesis. Bareiro-Saguier lays stress on the existence of two main narrative currents appearing in Yo el Supremo: one of them leads to the past and the other to the future. While the first narrative current does not constitute anything new within a temporal historical analysis, the second one - facts that take place after El Supremo's death but are narrated by him - represents a literary resource which demonstrates the author's political consciousness, which determines an active relation of the narrator (present) with the novel's protagonist (past)<sup>34</sup>.

Several themes of the present or, at least, which occurred after Francia's death, are touched on in the

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34. See BAREIRO-SAGUIER, Rubén, "La historia y las historias in Yo el Supremo de Augusto Roa Bastos", in: ANDREU, Jean et alii, op. cit., p. 30.

book, such as, for instance, Brazilian imperialism in Paraguay; the references to El Supremo's successors in the Government; and the wars of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870) and the Chaco (1932-1935).

In this way, past, present and future are dialectically interwoven. I believe that one of the main reasons why this mixture of past and present succeeds so perfectly is the fact that the author is not inserted into the novel as a character, but as a "compiler", a word which explicitly shows his objective: to destroy the illusion of historical re-creation. In view of this it is not surprising that El Supremo constantly refers to facts that followed his death, which will be analysed subsequently.

#### *4.1 The character's posthumous status*

It is interesting to note El Supremo's obsession with time, with the slow passing of time in Paraguay<sup>35</sup>, particularly if one considers the fact that he is speaking after his death, a condition that disregards the notion of time.

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35. "Lo que ocurre es que en el Paraguay el tiempo es muy lento de tan apurado que anda, barajando hechos, traspapelando cosas. La suerte nace aquí cada mañana y ya está vieja al mediodía dice un viejo dicho, nuevo a cada día. La única manera de impedirlo es sujetar el tiempo y volver a empezar" (YES, p.210).

Early in the narrative, we find the official letter of the Villa Franca's commander, providing details about the exequies of the deceased dictator, which occurred on the days 18, 19 and 20<sup>36</sup>. The letter ends with commander Escobar's questioning the veracity of the report of El Supremo's death, since on that morning there were some rumours that the dictator was still alive, "esto es, que no ha muerto" (YES, p.17). Francia's answer is immediate:

"Contesta al comandante de Villa Franca que no he muerto aún, si estar muerto significa yacer simplemente bajo una lápida donde algún idiota bribón escribirá un epitafio por el estilo de: Aquí yace el Supremo Dictador/para memoria y constancia/ de la Patria vigilante defensor... etcétera, etcétera" (YES, p.18, my emphasis)<sup>37</sup>.

These words reveal that his death may have occurred in the material sense but, behind this, there is some thing more important which remains in the memory of the people, namely, the work done by El Supremo. Accordingly, the final evidence of the fact that the novel is written from a posthumous perspective, i.e., that the character is

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36. Here the novel does not specify which is the month concerned. As it is known that Francia died on the 20th of September, 1840, these funerals on the 18th, 19th and 20th serve to temporarily bewilder the reader, mainly because soon afterwards the doubt appears whether the dictator is still alive. Yet, the confusion is undone later, when the exact day of the official letter is disclosed: 20th October, 1840 (see YES, p.18).

37. This is Francia's real epitaph. See CHAVES, Júlio César, op. cit. p. 471.

already physically dead from the first page of the novel, only serves to confirm a supposition. Francia, then, asks Patiño

"De qué fecha es el oficio? Del 21 de octubre de 1840, Excelencia. Aprende, Patiño: He aquí un paraguayo que se adelanta a los acontecimientos. Mete su oficio por el ojo de la cerradura de un mes aún no llegado. Salta por encima de los embarullamientos del tiempo" (YES, p. 18).

This dialogue took place at least a month after the dictator's death, which occurred on the 20th of September of 1840. It serves, thus, not only to characterize the *post mortem* status of El Supremo in the novel but also, and most important, to establish the connection between past and future (the dictator's future), which is the primary theme of the narrative.

Frequently, in the course of the novel we realize that El Supremo's voice comes from beyond the tomb. Some illustrations of this may be discerned when El Supremo says: "Estar muerto y seguir de pie es mi fuerte, y aunque para mí todo es viaje de regreso, voy siempre de adiós hacia adelante, nunca volviendo, ¿eh?" (YES, p.185-6). Or the dialogue with Efigenio Cristaldo, described as a "future hero" (YES, p.200), which can be juxtaposed with the appendix added by the compiler about Francia's mortal remains being kept in "un cajón de fideos" (YES, p.464): "¿Donde estás Efigenio?

¿No me escuchas? ¡No bien, Excelencia! ¡Lo escucho como si su voz estuviera bajo tierra! ¡No bajo tierra sino que en una lata de fideos!" (YES, p.202). Other examples of his posthumous status are the conversation with Belgrano's ghost (one of his few friends): "Entre los no-vivos reina igualdad absoluta" (YES, p.275); or the echo which could always be heard, coming from the "silencio de las profundidades" (YES, p.276); or when the "finado dictador" (YES, p. 18) and the "ex-Supremo" are mentioned by Sultán (YES, p.419).

The important point, however, is to understand the author's objective in utilizing this structure, which served as a basis for El Supremo's defence against the calumnies spread about him. Thus, it is not surprising that in the middle of the book, after the description of the year of his death [1840 (YES, p.268)], which contains the list of events which happened in the epoch, he shows what the people feel about him, when he says: "congoja colectiva (sólo después de mi desaparición)" (YES, p.268). For this reason, the dictator reproaches the "pasquinaros que se atreven a presentar la Dictadura Perpetua como una época tenebrosa, despótica, agobiante" (Ibid.).

When El Supremo mentions the unhappy history of Paraguay, we realize that he is referring only to the events which took place before his government and, then, after his death. He refers mainly to the occurrences which destroyed Paraguay, such as the already mentioned wars, and the



consequent dramatic situation of the people enduring widespread misery and the catastrophic dependence on foreign countries.

#### 4.2 The "necessary anachronisms"

These narrative strategies which highlight different levels of time constitute the "necessary anachronisms", according to Hegel's definition extensively used in Roa Bastos' novel: "the inner substance of what is represented remains the same, but the developed culture in representing and unfolding the substantial necessitates a change in the expression and form of the latter"<sup>38</sup>.

These anachronisms appear in the main narrative current, and start by anticipating the death of the dictator. As mentioned, as soon as the reader opens the book, he is placed in front of a lampoon which prophetically announces El Supremo's death, supposedly before it actually occurred. After this introductory hint at a fact that becomes clear later, namely, the already analysed posthumous status of the protagonist, the dictator starts to dictate the *Circular*

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38. HEGEL, G.F., apud LUKÁCS, Georg, op. cit., p.61. As in Scott's fiction, analysed by Lukács, Roa Bastos also makes use of these "necessary anachronisms", which consist "simply in allowing his character to express feelings and thoughts about real, historical relationships in a much clearer way than the actual men and women of the time would have done" (LUKÁCS, Georg, op.cit., p.63).

*Perpétua*, which serves as *leit motif* for the novel. His objective is to elucidate to all Paraguayan citizens some obscure aspects of the history of their country. From this point onwards, the narrative branches out into several parallel accounts<sup>39</sup>, the most important of which is *El Cuaderno Privado* because it allows a full grasp of the history contained in the *Circular Perpétua*. In this private notebook El Supremo makes comments about his private life, which render it easier to understand him as a historical character.

These two narrative poles represent the already mentioned currents leading to the past and to the future, establishing the "necessary anachronisms" for the global comprehension of history. These anachronisms, which appear in the "Private Notebook" and other personal digressions, occur

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39. See, for instance, the study made by Peter Turton, "Yo el Supremo: una verdadera revolución novelesca", op. cit., p.12 and 13. In this work the author separates the different elements of the discourse, emphasizing: 1. the voice coming from beyond the tomb; 2. the dictation to Policarpo Patiño (*Circular Perpetua*); 3. the private notebook (*Cuaderno Privado*); 4. the *cuaderno de bitacora* (later included in the private notebook); 5. the tutorial voice (the father's); 6. two manuscripts (the initial lampoon placed at the cathedral's door and the signed draft of Pueyrredon); 7. the official letter by the Villa Franca's commandant; 8. the voice of the dog Sultán (a ghost that haunts El Supremo); 9. a person who corrects the texts written by Supremo (*de letra desconocida*) - there is no proof that it is one person only. Perhaps this unknown handwriting is due to: 10. the final voice (opposing the whole of Francia's work); 11. voices with whom El Supremo seems to maintain a dialogue (thinkers, philosophers, historians); 12. the compiler's notes; 13. an appendix (about the destiny of El Supremo's mortal remains); 14. the final compiler's note; 15. *todo lo demás*.

in a variety of ways<sup>40</sup>.

Concerning history, these anachronisms always serve to clarify its obscure aspects, particularly when the future has proved how much Francia was right in some of the policies he adopted. We have seen, for instance, El Supremo's frequent reference to Bartolomé Mitre and how he introduces the theme of the Triple Alliance War. This advance into the future serves to show Francia's thought - opposed to Mitre's - whose main characteristic was to defend the autonomy of the Paraguayan nation. Considering this aspect we can understand why he inserts the two next presidents of Paraguay in the narrative. This happens because both maintain the same principles of defence of the country's sovereignty during their governments. When El Supremo comments with Patiño about the school compositions written about him, he detaches one by Francisco Solano López, then 13 years old:

"'Pido al Supremo Gobierno el espadín del Dictador Perpetuo, para tenerlo en custodia en defensa de la patria'. Este niño tiene alma bravía. Envíale el espadín. Señor con su licencia le recuerdo que es hijo de Carlos Antonio López [...] Tú también vas a acordarte de Don Carlos Antonio López, futuro presidente del Paraguay" (YES, p.434).

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40. I am analysing here the anachronisms which have a direct relation to history, but there are many other references to the future. Some of them are directed to other authors (Roa Bastos himself is included - see YES, p.216; p.291 and p.376), to future short stories, such as the one by João Guimarães Rosa, "A terceira margem do Rio" (YES, p. 131-2), to songs, such as Geraldo Vandré's "Para não falar de flores" (YES, p.255), etc. For comments about these anachronisms, see BAREIRO-SAGUIER, Rubén, op. cit., p.32-33 and RAMA, Angel, op. cit., p.26.

Yet, continuing the prophecies, or "necessary anachronisms", El Supremo warns Patiño that he will not see Carlos Antonio López in power because he will hang himself first: "Antes que ascienda su estrella en el cielo de la Patria, la soga de tu hamaca cerrará su nudo en torno a tu cuello" (YES, p.434).

The war of Triple Alliance, which culminated with the death of Solano López and the destruction of the most progressive and autonomous country of Latin America, represented the Paraguayans' last attempt to maintain their sovereignty, achieved during Francia's government. The result of the war was disastrous not only for Paraguay. And this is the point El Supremo tries to make: how the countries forming the Triple Alliance, i.e., Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, while serving the interests of the British Empire, and victims of the pressure of this foreign power, also destroyed themselves with this tragic war. The victors, ruined by the high costs of the war, became subject to British capital which had financed them.

Another man who tried to defend the supremacy of the Paraguayan nation (at the time already very shaken) was Colonel Estigarribia. He is also inserted in the text in a peculiar way, i.e., anachronically, since he was the commander of the Paraguayan army during the Chaco war. This war was also financed by foreign capital, this time not by

the British, but by the North American<sup>41</sup>. When, almost a century before the Chaco War, El Supremo becomes irritated with his doctor, the herbalist Estigarribia, because the latter does not know how to cure his illness, he says:

"¡Lástima de hombre ignorante! Peor aún si se considera que usted vendrá a ser el antepasado de uno de los más grandes generales de nuestro país. Si usted defendiera mi salud con la estrategia de los corralitos copiada a la de ese descendiente suyo que defendió-recuperó el Chaco poco menos que a una de los descendientes bolivianos, ya me habría sanado usted" (YES, p.124, my emphasis).

Having in mind Francia's defence of his country's sovereignty, it seems quite understandable that a man who also defended the Guaraní nation, though much later and under different circumstances, i.e., Colonel Estigarribia, is inserted in the narrative.

There is thus a very clear correlation between

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41. "The Chaco war began in 1932. The Bolivians were confident of rapid victory. They greatly outnumbered the Paraguayans; their army had been trained by a German general; and they had used generous loans from U.S. banks to import military equipment left over from the First World War. The Paraguayans, however, are a warrior race; they had the interior lines and were nearer their base; and they were better acquainted than the Bolivians with the terrain. The Bolivian army consisted mostly of Indians, devoid of patriotism, who had been brought down from the bleak Andean altitudes to fight in the unaccustomed heat of the lowland plain. Casualties in the fighting and from diseases were heavy on the both sides, but the Paraguayan commander Colonel Estigarribia, outwitted the enemy by sending his men in small groups or singly behind their lines to cut communications and seize supplies. The Paraguayans steadily advanced. To invade the highlands of Bolivia, however, was beyond their power. So an armistice was agreed in 1935, and by the subsequent peace treaty Paraguay gained possession of most of the disputed territory". In: PENDLE, George. A History of Latin America. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978, p.210-11 (my emphasis).

the present and the future, and all these journeys into the future reveal El Supremo's worldview. Trying to preserve the unity of the only Latin American nation still not deformed by foreign capital, he throws sympathetic praises on these three men who later attempted the same, though in vain: the aforementioned Carlos Antonio López, Francisco Solano López and

Colonel Estigarribia. In this way, through the struggle of El Supremo and his successors, we may glimpse what would be the future, i.e., the present of the Paraguayan nation.

Using a personality from the past who had a much clearer historical perspective than the present personalities who govern Latin American countries, the author wants to demonstrate how much Paraguay has retrogressed in general terms and, particularly, in terms of its historical consciousness. In the present day there is an attempt to cover up the past, erasing from the memory of the people the achievements, the justice, the progress and the equality prevailing during Francia's government, maybe because remembering causes frustration or rebellions. In this context, El Supremo's historical consciousness may be compared to the two above mentioned *porteños*, Belgrano and Echevarria. The dictator tries to make them understand that his country had not been isolated by his own wish, but was forced into it by the Buenos Aires governments which, since the revolution of independence, took control over the rivers, closing the doors for any Paraguayan external trade. Francia still tries

to show them that their mission's real goal is to subordinate Paraguay to Argentine domination. When El Supremo tells the *porteños* that he does not believe in the peace, union and free trade they offer him, Echevarria retorts:

"Ya hemos discutido y aclarado bastante ese equívoco, que no es tal. Preferiríamos, señor vocal decano [Francia], no enredarnos en consideraciones laterales. Usted es uno de los intelectuales más alumbrados de nuestra América. ¿A qué perder tiempo con el pasado?" [Francia's answer is immediate] "Vea, doctor, aquí en el Paraguay el hombre más alumbrado que tenemos es el farolero de la ciudad. Enciende y apaga quinientas mil velas al año. Hasta él sabe que el porvenir es nuestro pasado. Despabilemos las velas nosotros también. Hablemos del porvenir. Cómo no. Con mucho gusto. Con tantísimo gusto. Es mi materia" (YES, p.224, my emphasis).

El Supremo demonstrates, therefore, that he is conscious of the fact that the progress of the country is unattainable if the people do not take into consideration the experience of the past, whether good or bad, which have been accumulated throughout history. The future may not be entirely grasped except as an accumulation of past experiences. It only exists to the proportion with which humanity solves the contradictions of the present. Hence, the dialectical connection between past and future, between the knowledge of the past and the understanding of what the future will be, appears throughout Roa Bastos' work. His words are always directed to the present, the only time dimension we can really grasp in its totality, because, as El Supremo says,

"El presente es de todos. Nadie pierde el pasado ni el porvenir, pues a nadie pueden quitarle lo que no tiene" (YES, p.247).

We realize, thus, that Roa Bastos has made a thorough historical analysis in Yo el Supremo, when he used the theme of the past not as a flight from the present - which would reveal a romantic attitude - but as a means to explain the present. And the present, when understood and interpreted, creates the prospects of a better future.

#### 4.3 *Brazilian imperialism*

The attempts of the Empire of Brazil to spoliage the small neighbouring country may also be inserted in this context. They started in Francia's epoch and continue until the present day. This aspect reveals the connection between the past and the future with the purpose of clarifying the present.

The person of Manuel Correia da Câmara, representative of Don Pedro I, the Emperor of Brazil, in Paraguay, epitomizes all the Brazilian attempts to subjugate Paraguay, not only those made during El Supremo's government, but also all modern efforts made by the giant neighbouring country to render Paraguay more and more dependent. In this way, the notion of the past as the pre-history of the present appears very clearly. Roa Bastos connects them skillfully,



always demonstrating Paraguay's present situation of dependence on Brazil and El Supremo's endeavours to avoid it.

I have already mentioned the preponderant role of Brazil in the war of the Triple Alliance, which represented the start of Paraguayan decline. It caused the loss of its sovereignty and brought about the frustration of El Supremo's dream. After this war, the Brazilian presence in the country became increasingly strengthened, particularly in recent decades. In 1973, the Itaipú project was conceived, which is to be the greatest hydroelectric complex in the world. Hobsbawm emphasizes the main characteristic of this "joint venture" which will increase Paraguayan dependence on Brazil:

"Having escaped the fate of the banana republic, Paraguay may well become the first 'hydroelectric republic'. Brazilian economic expansion has long been colonizing its southern and southwestern borders. Already the *cruzeiro* rather than the *guaraní* is the effective money up to halfway into Paraguay, and Brazilians are buying up land which is by their standards, both cheap and underused. The Itaipú project is, of course, a joint venture, half the energy going to Paraguay, which will not need more than 5 per cent of its share; Brazil is kindly offering to buy the rest at a price fixed for the next half-century"<sup>42</sup>.

In Yo el Supremo, this "imperialist" condition Brazil assumes with growing intensity, appears particularly during the missions of the envoy Correia da Câmara. His

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42. HOBSBAWM, Eric J., "Dictatorship with Charm", in: The New York Review of Books, New York, October 2, 1975, p.24. See also BAREIRO-SAGUIER, Rubén, op. cit., p.36-37.

conversation with El Supremo shows the connection between past and present which Lukács underlined, emphasizing that "without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible" and also, when the critic observes that "contemporary situation can clearly reveal the particular trends which have objectively led to the present"<sup>43</sup>.

Accordingly, when El Supremo of Paraguay meets the envoy of the Empire of Brazil, he is aware of facts that will occur in the next century. Thus, in a memorable play of words<sup>44</sup>, the dictator refers to the above mentioned hydroelectric and can foresee what it will mean for his country:

"Los saltos de agua. Las presas. Sobre todo las presas que quieren convertimos en una presa ao gosto do Imperio mais grande do mundo!" (YES, p.255).

Roa Bastos attempts to demonstrate the "voracidad insaciable" of Brazil, which "se tragará un día al continente entero si se lo descuida" (YES, p.85)<sup>45</sup>, through

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43. LUKÁCS, Georg, op. cit., p.53 and p.169.

44. The Spanish word *presa* means both "dam" and "prisoner", a clear reference to the Itaipú dam and the consequent "imprisonment" of the Paraguayan population.

45. It is oportune to remember here Palmieri's comment about the session of the Brazilian parliament of the 6th of April, 1976, when the MP Pedro Lauro suggested the annexation of Paraguay to Brazil, which shows the actuality of Francia's defence of Paraguayan sovereignty. See MARINI PALMIERI, Enrique, "Roa Bastos: Yo el Supremo (1974)", in: VERDEVOYE, Paul (ed). "Caudillos", "Caciques" et Dictateurs dans le Roman Hispano Americain. Paris, Éditions Hispaniques, 1978, p. 342.

images which clearly reflect the links between past and present. In the account of the visits made by Correia da Câmara to the Paraguayan dictator, there are the most significant analogies which clearly relate to the present. In the first image, El Supremo proposes a riddle to the Imperial envoy, asking him why the lion, king of the "ladronicidios selváticos" (YES, p.50), which frightens all animals, is only afraid of the white cock. The reference is quite obvious. The lion represents the Empire of Brazil and the white cock acts in the open, singing when the sun rises and being, thus, a symbol of the sun - represents the honesty of the newly-born Paraguayan republic. Yet, El Supremo has no false illusions and warns Patiño that this situation may be reversed. Thus, it is not hard to imagine that "el rey de los ladronicidios selváticos cometa la salvajada de meterse al gallo en la panza" (YES, Ibid.). Another symbol used by El Supremo to describe Paraguay is that of a "manso cordero" (YES, p.85) whereas Brazil is seen as a hungry wolf, with dreams of devouring it. It is an image which corroborates the reference made a little earlier about the Empire's "tramposas maquinaciones, acechanzas, bellaquerías y perversiones, antes y después de nuestra Independencia" (YES, Idem).

In my opinion, however, the more perfect analogy appears when El Supremo and Correia da Câmara attend a theatre play, whose actress represents the "Republic", i.e.,

the Paraguayan State. The republic, characterized by the beautiful Indian girl, arouses the voracity of the Imperial agent who "la devora con una mirada obscurecida por el brillo del deseo" (YES, p.253). The use of these images by El Supremo proves, once more, Roa Bastos' clear historical perspective, since all of them continue to have an enormous significance in the present.

The non-preoccupation with the chronology and the bridge between the past and recent history are also shown when the dictator mixes the second and the third missions of the Brazilian envoy to Paraguay. Already in his second mission Correia da Câmara does not receive permission to go beyond Itapuã, being detained there from September, 1827, to June, 1829 (YES, p.373). Therefore, it is interesting to observe that, at the beginning of the chapter, Francia refers to the "Revolución de los farrapos en Brasil" (YES, p.272)<sup>46</sup>, which was the reason for this new visit of Correia da Câmara to Paraguay. He "antes vino como emi\_sário del Imperio; ahora como embajador de la república" (YES, Idem).

Considering the fact that in Brazil the republic was proclaimed only in 1889, half a century after Francia's death, we realize that El Supremo is referring to the frustrated goal of the Farroupilha Revolution, which was the separation of the State of Rio Grande do Sul from the rest of

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46. *Farrapos* (literally "rags") were the members of the Republican Party in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The Farroupilha Revolution lasted ten years, from 1830 to 1840.

Brazil and to transform it into an independent republic. However, in my viewpoint, this "republic" also concerns the present republic, which would show again the analogy between past and present verified in the whole novel.

Roa Bastos demonstrates, in this way, the lucidity of a character who, while trying to maintain the freedom and autonomy of his country during his government, foresees Paraguay's current situation of dependence on international imperialism. But this is not presented in a pessimistic way because, almost at the end of the book, El Supremo confirms his faith in the capacity of the people to create their own history:

"cuando los invasores se den cuenta de su error acorrallados entre el trueno e y el relámpago por este aparente espejismo de hombres y mujeres que defienden su heredad en ropa de trabajo, sabrán que sólo puede ser vencido el pueblo que quiere serlo" (YES, p.401).

## C O N C L U S I O N S

The central concern of this thesis was the analysis of some aspects of power and history, in particular their materialization in Latin American historical processes, and their relationship with the novels El Recurso del Método, by Alejo Carpentier, Yo el Supremo, by Augusto Roa Bastos and El Otoño del Patriarca, by Gabriel García Márquez. To reach this objective, my primary intention was to establish the crucial differences between El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, on the one hand, and Yo el Supremo, on the other. The study sought to prove that the picturesque dictators created by Carpentier and García Márquez, in spite of their many idiosyncrasies, can perhaps be inscribed in the gallery of those traditional historical and fictional tyrants, whose actions and styles of government are typical of Latin American history. The exercise of power, in this case, undoubtedly means activities only for their own benefit or that of their *protégés* - a permanent

practice of corruption sustained by means of political oppression. I have initially underlined the fact that they appear to be infinitely powerful, with no boundaries to delimit the range of their power. However, the fundamental point is concerned with the chimerical and fragile nature of their domination. The unceasing pursuit of power reveals that their far-reaching rule is indeed only apparent, for it is, in fact, subordinated and commanded by foreign metropolitan countries. The dictators produced by Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez are clearly shown as mere puppets manipulated by foreign decisions and their countries have endured first European - particularly British - domination, which was later replaced by North - American world hegemony.

Meanwhile, Roa Bastos' novel, Yo el Supremo, presents a dictator whose political standing lies totally opposed to the rulers mentioned above. El Supremo can be singled out for his attempts to maintain the cultural autonomy and the economic independence of his nation. I have demonstrated, by way of various examples, that El Supremo earnestly struggled against all initiatives of the external forces in Paraguay, especially those encapsulated under the ideological banner of "free trade". But I have also shown that El Supremo is imbued with Roa Bastos' world vision and, in consequence, embodies a complexity probably unknown in the real dictator.

This initial analysis of power, mostly related to the external factors of dependency and the ensuing economic and political subordination experienced by the Latin American countries exemplified in the novels, is followed by the examination of other aspects of power. They are mainly internally-developed characteristics that concern not only the social structure but the individual dictators who, coincidentally, may be distinguished in the three novels under investigation.

I have then emphasized that the most remarkable characteristic these *personnages* have in common is the solitude they feel as a result of their incapacity for love. The extensive power they have accumulated is responsible for the loneliness that isolates them from those around them and even from their people. This is perhaps the most corrosive feeling that haunts the characters. Though I have not intended to explore the psychological aspects that underline the dictators' characteristic solitude, it must be stressed that their isolation stems from their lack of love, that is, solidarity, towards the people. The depressing loneliness they experience is, then, seen as the result of their blind pursuit of power - in Nietzschean terms, "the will to power" - which is their innermost motivating force.

Thereafter, I have analysed another common feature in the novels, viz., the fact that all the three dictators are assisted by doubles who manifestly serve to



intensify their influence. The narratives evince the instrumental role of the double in guaranteeing the dictators' power. I have shown that although the only double who is physically similar to the despot is Aragonés, in El Otoño del Patriarca, the other doubles also perform important roles as protectors of the power structure maintained by their masters.

Subsequently, I have developed an analysis of the innate violence derived from the concentration of power which is frequently shown in the narratives. Again, I have attempted to separate the violence perpetrated by the Patriarca and the Primer Magistrado from that practiced by El Supremo. In accordance with what I have maintained in most of this study, I have demonstrated that the former two usually utilized violent methods to preserve their personal power, whereas El Supremo supported authoritarian rather than violent mechanisms with the sole purpose of benefitting the people. His actions were directed against those accustomed to accumulate privileges through various forms of social exploitation, in particular the big landowners, who were harshly expropriated.

In the second part of this research I have examined how some concepts of history are employed in the novels. The third chapter refers to Carpentier's work, particularly to El Recurso del Método, but it also focuses briefly on some previous novels. In a concise analysis, I

have shown the evolution of Carpentier's world vision, which becomes transparent throughout his work by means of aborted revolutions. Yet, this view does not reveal a pessimistic or conservative evaluation of revolutionary processes because the author demonstrates his solid hope in fundamental social changes, reaffirming the possibility of their concretization through the ideas expressed by The Student.

I have also introduced the analysis of some themes debated in the novel, i.e., the expansion of North - American hegemony, the increase of social unrest, the diffusion of communist and anarchist doctrines, the construction of magnificent works, exemplified by the Capitol, and the arrival of Italian opera companies in Latin America, which are representative of the profound transformations occurring in that historical period - the first quarter of the twentieth century. Finally, I have laid stress on the fact that historical events are reelaborated through a literary treatment which bears no resemblance to a sociological tract on the subject. For this very reason, Carpentier's creation of the literary dictator is non-manichean, as he presents the good and the evil facets of his personality, i.e., his high culture contrasted with his barbarous policies.

Next, I have discussed the literary use of historical ideas in El Otoño del Patriarca, where I have demonstrated that, in spite of the hyperbolic tone of the

narrative, there is an extraordinary verisimilitude with the concrete history of Latin America. A crucial element here was the absence of historical consciousness in the characters created by García Márquez and Carpentier, that is, their lack of understanding history as a process subjected to ceaseless and progressive change. I have indicated that this is due, particularly, to the characters' ill-founded conception of time: firstly, they show a false perspective of time, seen as a mere circle of events, whose continuous repetition degrades their social life and leads to their inevitable decadence and eventual destruction; secondly, they repress past memories, a fundamental aspect for the development of a historical consciousness. I have observed, however, that these ideas are asserted by the characters, not by the authors, being in fact radically opposed to the writers' world vision. Indeed, these conceptions - an illusory notion of time and repressed past events - are the reasons why they [the characters] succumb at the end.

The concluding chapter situated the analysis of Yo el Supremo within a historical perspective. It shows how the novel presents a new version of official Paraguayan history. Although Roa Bastos' character was moulded on the real ruler who governed Paraguay in the first half of the eighteenth century, the author did not follow exactly the description of El Supremo presented by traditional textbooks. He actually rebuilt this historical dictator and though he

has based his arguments on official records, he frequently refused to accept them as truth. Whereas Carpentier and García Márquez used the history of Latin America to create their fictional characters, who crystallize in themselves the individual or the collective characteristics of various dictators, Roa Bastos used historical sources only to bestow an alternative direction to their interpretation. As the writer has indicated, he tried to produce a "counter-history" of Paraguay, emphasizing the dialectical nature of historical processes, so that in the sequence I have examined all connections between past, present and future, which permeates this literary work.

This thesis was intended to prove that Alejo Carpentier, Augusto Roa Bastos and Gabriel García Márquez, whose life perspectives are framed within the tenets of Marxist theory and ethics, wrote novels that reflect their world vision. While refuting some critical references made to these works, I have demonstrated that they were not only consonant with their authors' ideology but also that Carpentier, Roa Bastos and García Márquez produced outstanding literary pieces. Considering, in the same way, that there is no great work of literature which contributes to the oppression of man by man, I have decided to examine the reasons why the authors mentioned are very generous when describing their dictators, showing also their human dimension along with their tyrannical acts. Because, as Sartre

emphasizes,

"it would be inconceivable that this unleashing of generosity provoked by the writer could be used to authorize an injustice, and that the reader could enjoy his freedom while reading a work which approves or accepts or simply abstains from condemning the subject - tion of man by man"<sup>1</sup>.

I have attempted to prove, therefore, that in the case of El Recurso del Método and El Otoño del Patriarca, the writers sometimes sympathetic approach towards the dictators is only apparent. Carpentier and García Márquez present the "human side" of the tyrants only to state the contradictions inherent in the human being and, thus, render them more believable. While the reader may identify himself/herself with the despots, by feeling pity or the like, he becomes involved with the characters and, consequently, is able to apprehend better the horrors of the regimes they represent. In addition to this, I endeavoured to show that the despots are destroyed in the eyes of the reader through the writer's use of a devastating weapon: laughter. The *ironical ambience*, characteristic of the development of the narrative, is a powerful resource used to undermine the power of the tyrants. I have also tried to demonstrate that in the case of Yo el Supremo, on the other hand, the author's

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1. SARTRE, Jean-Paul. What is Literature? London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1978, p.45.

"unleashing of generosity" when describing Francia, has the opposite purpose of "*desauthorizing* an injustice": the unfair evaluation made by the official historiography about the Paraguayan dictator. He has always been depicted by the historians as an oppressor and not as a statesman whose primary objective was to promote social justice. Roa Bastos' account of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia tries to redeem the individual forgotten by history, as well as the public man whose acts had been misunderstood for decades.

Another argument I have raised throughout this work is that although these novels evolve from the perspective of the power holder, so that the reader is placed at the centre of the power decisions, it soon becomes clear that the dictators' importance can not be individualized, and that their intelligibility only appears if they are seen as representative of their societies and of their time. In this respect, it is worth quoting Plekanov, who correctly underlined that

"We must bear in mind the following: in considering the role of great individuals in history we almost invariably suffer from optical illusion. In assuming the role of the "good sword" to preserve public order, Napoleon by the same token pushed aside all other generals some of whom could have played the same role equally or almost as well. Once the social need for a vigorous military administration was satisfied, the path to this post was blocked to all others [...] this accounts for the optical illusion just mentioned. Napoleon's personal power appears to us in an extremely exaggerated form because we ascribe to it all the social power which pushed his personal power to the fore and supported it. It seems to be something totally exceptional, because other similar powers had not passed from potentiality to actuality"<sup>2</sup>.

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2. PLEKANOV, Georgi, "The Role of the Individual in History", in: Dialectics, New York, number 9, not dated, p.15.

Even accepting, with Angel Rama, that "si algo prueba insistentemente Yo el Supremo, es la singularidad del Doctor Francia"<sup>3</sup>, I have shown that the dictator is able to incarnate the "representativity" of his people, though in a different way when compared to the Patriarca and the Primer Magistrado. It is my contention, therefore, that the three writers here investigated wanted to mirror their societies through the development of the fictional dictators, even if, at times, they seem to be too psychologically oriented. For this very reason they do not name their characters other than generically as El Supremo, Patriarca or Primer Magistrado. Despite their marked individual characteristics, all of them have, as a result, only a relative value within the society they politically control and dominate.

Finally, it is important to point out that literature, in a historical period marked by various forms of social oppression, has the right and, in fact, has the duty, of assuming its role, opening new roads towards social change. The writers studied in this thesis have used their own weapons to advocate the need for social justice and, mainly, their unshakable belief that men will be able to free themselves from all forms of tyranny the power holders have imposed throughout history. Like Gramsci, they know that

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3. RAMA, Angel. Los Dictadores Latinoamericanos, op. cit., p.25.

"Men, as individuals and *en masse*, find themselves placed brutally before the following dilemma: chances of death one hundred, chances of life ten, a choice must be made. And men always choose the chances of life, even if these are slight, even if they offer a wretched and exhausted life. They fight for these slight chances, and their vitality is such and their passion so great that they break every obstacle and sweep away even the most awesome apparatus of power"<sup>4</sup>.

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4. GRAMSCI, Antonio, op. cit., p.15.



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